

A photograph of four Australian students in school uniforms walking towards the camera. In the foreground, a boy is slightly out of focus. Behind him, a girl with blonde pigtails, a boy with a backpack, and a girl with glasses and a backpack are smiling. They are walking on a paved path in front of a building with large glass windows.

What Australian students say about transition to secondary school

Final report

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What Australian students say about transition to secondary school: Final report

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ISBN 978-1-74286-644-4

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Citation (APA 7th edition)

Sniedze-Gregory, S., Felgate, R., O'Grady, E., Buckley, S., & Lietz, P. (2021). *What Australian students say about transition to secondary school. Final report*. Australian Council for Educational Research. <https://doi.org/10.37517/978-1-74286-644-4>

The views expressed in this report are those of the authors and not necessarily those of Life Education Australia.

Contents

Acknowledgements.....	4
Executive Summary.....	5
Intended outcomes.....	5
Report structure and summary	5
Section One: Literature Review and Environmental Scan.....	7
Australian school context.....	7
Purpose	8
Literature review.....	9
Environmental scan.....	16
Analysis of existing programs and resources.....	26
Section Two: Method.....	28
Target population.....	29
Student forum design	35
Ethics	42
Student forum implementation.....	42
Data capture and coding.....	43
Data analysis.....	43
Section Three: Student Voice.....	45
School-based transition programs.....	45
Student perception of transition (Activity 1).....	46
Students' feelings about transition (Activity 2a)	48
Explanations of feelings (Activity 2b).....	50
Identifying the main challenges (Activity 3a)	53
Potential solutions (Activity 3b).....	55
What do students want to know? (Activity 4).....	58
Learning preferences	61
Section Four: Conclusions and Recommendations	62
Long-term aims	63
Recommendations	63
References.....	66
Appendix 1: Literature searches	72
Appendix 2: Environmental scan search terms	75
Appendix 3: Student forum support slides – Primary	77
Appendix 4: Student forum support slides – Secondary	78
Appendix 5: Forum workbook – Primary	79
Appendix 6: Forum workbook – Secondary.....	83
Appendix 7: Analysis by school & student demographics, overview table	87

Acknowledgements

This research was conducted on the traditional lands of the Awabakal, Djirbalngan, Eora, Jagera, Kurna, Kuring-gai, Nawu, Nganyaywana, Tharawal, Ugarapul, Wajuk, Wiradjuri, Yidindji and Yuggera nations. The Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) would like to acknowledge the Traditional Owners of these lands, pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging, and acknowledge the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who continue to contribute to our work in improving learning, education and research.

ACER would like to extend our sincere gratitude to the students who participated in the Forums. These students were the centre of the project: they provided a rich insight into the world of school transition through their candid responses to the forum questions and the lived experiences they brought to the table. ACER would also like to thank the schools and teachers who generously gave their time to facilitate and welcome the Student Forum research teams into their always-busy learning environments.

The Student Forums project was commissioned and funded by Life Education Australia (LEA), via a grant from the Department for Education, Skills and Employment (DESE). ACER extends thanks and appreciation to LEA and DESE for their ongoing support throughout the project.

ACER would like to acknowledge the support of the nine external authorities who provided research ethics permission for the study, allowing researchers to approach school principals with an invitation to participate. These authorities included state government education departments in New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia and Western Australia, and Catholic Education authorities in the Archdioceses of Adelaide, Brisbane, Perth, and the Dioceses of Bathurst and Maitland-Newcastle. These authorities were in addition to ACER's internal research ethics review process.

Conducting research in schools during a global pandemic involves a significant level of risk management combined with a willingness to gamble that schools and state borders might remain open at a scheduled school visit time. The project team thanks everyone who took that gamble with us: thankfully, all school visits were able to be conducted during times of the lowest levels of COVID-19-related restrictions in the locations visited.

Executive Summary

Stage One of the Being Healthy Being Active project involved the collection of student voice related to the concept of “school transition”: the move from primary to secondary school. To this end, students from a variety of locations around Australia participated in 82 focus groups – *Student Forums* – to discuss their own positive experiences, as well as perceived needs and challenges related to their move to secondary school.

Based upon the outcomes and recommendations that have emerged from ACER’s engagement with students during Stage One, Life Education Australia (LEA) is well positioned to create a suite of resources and training opportunities for teachers.

Intended outcomes

The intended outcomes for Stage One of the project included effective student involvement in the development of the forums, and in the sharing of information and ideas from students regarding transition from primary to secondary. These intended outcomes facilitated the research goal of gaining a thorough understanding of contemporary issues faced by students in middle school, the potential gaps in knowledge experienced by students, and students’ preferred methods of learning and engagement¹.

The project outcomes were addressed through a range of activities. These included student involvement in the design and development of the Student Forums, the delivery of the Student Forums, and ensuring that schools sampled for the project included a diverse range of contexts that were reflective of Australian schools.

Report structure and summary

The project report is comprised of four sections. *Section One* is the literature review and environmental scan, presented to LEA in September 2020. This was conducted prior to the Student Forums and had two main purposes. Firstly, it ensured that the student forums were grounded in a strong research base to enable effective engagement with students while allowing for the emergence of new knowledge. Secondly, it identified existing resources already available to Australian teachers, parents and students so that best practice could be leveraged rather than replicated.

The literature review and environmental scan concluded that there are gaps and overlaps in existing knowledge and programs related to school transition. In addition, existing knowledge and understanding is not always immediately transferable to a particular classroom context, resources are not always developed from a positive perspective – as contrasting with a ‘deficit’ perspective – and student voice is generally not yet evident in resource development.

Section Two describes the methods used to design and administer the Student Forums. This includes a description of the target population and sampling methods as well as the details of the achieved sample: 82 forums with 444 students across 15 schools. Student Forum design and development is

¹ *Intended Outcomes* listed for Stage One of Being Healthy Being Active project. Internal Life Education Australia document.

explained in detail, including the piloting process where students from the target population were intentionally included to provide input. This section also details the ethics applications submitted to relevant education authorities, the Student Forum implementation details, and a description of how data was captured, coded and analysed.

Section Three outlines the findings of the Student Forums. This section focuses on the student voice and presents results from each Forum activity, 1 through 4. While student thoughts and ideas have been collated into overarching themes, the less-common comments are also reported and discussed in order to fully represent the student voices collected. Overall findings from the student forums indicate both content and learning styles that students in the school transition years find useful.

Conversations with students indicated that students were already engaged in a variety of activities. These included research, applications to schools, and practising skills for high school, as well as recent orientation and change-management activities.

Students' feelings related to the transition process were mixed. While many students were happy or contented about their transition or looked forward to it, many students also commented on particular worries or uncertainties around the move to high school. These feelings were often interspersed, with individual students often identifying mixed emotions related to different aspects of their transition. The most common aspects of transition that prompted emotional responses – both positive and challenging – were academic expectations (level and workload), high school operational systems, and the social domain.

Students had many suggestions, however, for overcoming either potential challenges or the challenges they had experienced. While many suggestions were at the school level in terms of how schools or teachers could adjust systems to improve the transition experience, students particularly emphasised their wish to solve problems themselves and be their own agents of change and improvement.

Section Four offers conclusions and recommendations for LEA. The recommendations are for consideration when designing their suite of resources and training for teachers aimed at assisting students with the transition from primary to secondary school. A summary of the Student Forum outcomes is provided; needs, gaps and areas of potential focus for the resources are identified.

Together with the Rapid Review of literature related to best practice principles in the design and delivery of digital resources for teachers², this report and its resulting recommendations provide a robust platform on which Life Education Australia can position Stage Two (development of teacher resources) and Stage Three (upload and delivery of the resources) of the Being Healthy Being Active project.

² Internal Life Education Australia document. This document will be available on the LEA website in late 2021.

Section One: Literature Review and Environmental Scan

Adolescence has been conceptualised as a period of ‘storm and stress’ (Arnett, 1999) and a developmental stage associated with various transitions. These include biological, cognitive and social changes that are sometimes simultaneously occurring, and can lead to tension between the individual and their environment as they navigate a pathway towards establishing self-identity (Hollenstein & Loughheed, 2013; Molloy et al., 2011). The transition from primary to secondary schooling occurs during this developmental stage and requires adjustment to a new structural mode of learning and teaching, as well as new peer networks. Students who transition successfully are more likely to have higher or long-term success in measures of academic engagement and outcomes, and social-emotional and behavioural competencies, while students who do not are at greater risk of dropping out of school (Gonzales et al., 2014; Grossman & Cooney, 2009). Thus, resources and programs that support students to successfully navigate the transition from primary to secondary school are crucial. Resources and programs that support parents, caregivers, teachers and friends are also crucial as these are often the people who provide an immediate support network to transitioning students.

Life Education Australia (LEA), an independent provider of health education to children in Australia, has commissioned the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) to engage with 10–14 year old students about the concept of *transitions* through student forums in a diverse mix of Australian schools. Transitions are particularly relevant for students in this age group as they move from a primary to secondary style education while also navigating adolescence. Hence, brief consideration is given below to the Australian school context in which these transitions occur.

Australian school context

In 2020, most students in Australia make the transition from primary to secondary school in Year 7, and this is particularly the case in the government system where education is operated at the state level. This means that students are generally 11 or 12 years old when transitioning to secondary school (Year 7). There is one remaining exception, that of South Australia, where secondary school currently begins in Year 8 but will change to begin in Year 7 from the 2022 school year³.

The time of transition can vary in the non-government school sector. While some independent or Catholic schools might follow the government structure in their respective state, the three-level school structure of primary-middle-high school, with two distinct transitions, are also quite common. This structure occurs in both combination schools (hosting students across Foundation⁴ to Year 12) as well as in separate primary, middle and high school campuses.

The different school types in Australia catering for Foundation to Year 6 (primary), Years 7 to 12 (secondary) or a variety of structures within Foundation to Year 12 (including area schools) may impact the experience of transition. For students at schools that offer education from Foundation through to Year 12, for example, students may move from their primary to middle school with the same cohort or on the same campus, which may elicit different challenges when compared to students moving from a

³ The Australian school year runs from January to December.

⁴ In Australia, *Foundation* is the first year of primary schooling and is also known as *Reception*, *Kindergarten* or *Preparatory [Prep]* in some states. *Foundation* is used within this document as it aligns with the terminology used in the Australian Curriculum (ACARA, 2020).

primary school to a new secondary school in a different location or with few or no peers from their primary school.

The age children are permitted to start school also varies across states, though they must generally be at least five years old by the second term (April to June; exact cut-off date varies by state) of the year in which they start school. Children are required to have started school by the time they turn six.

Given these differences in starting age and state and school structures, Australian students could be between the ages of 10-14 at their (first) school transition, and it is on this age group that the literature review and environmental scan was centred.⁵

Purpose

LEA intends to create its own suite of resources and training opportunities based upon recommendations that will emerge from ACER's engagement with students. To support Life Education Australia's aim to create such resources, ACER has conducted this literature review and environmental scan with two main aims in mind. Firstly, the literature review identifies existing research and findings in the field of student transitions, so that the students forums which LEA has contracted ACER to conduct are grounded in a research evidence base. As such, the literature review provides both ACER and LEA a strong knowledge base from which they can engage with student transition opportunities and challenges in the Australian context, while allowing for the emergence of new knowledge. The literature review considered research and theory on cognitive, social-emotional and physical transitions in the fields of education, psychology and medicine, including behavioural and academic outcomes.

Secondly, as LEA intends to develop resources and training opportunities based on findings from the student forums, it is important to be aware of existing resources and training already available to Australian teachers, parents and students. This will ensure good practice is leveraged and built upon, rather than simply replicated. The environmental scan focused on existing transition programs and resources targeting teachers, students and families.

Together, the literature review and environmental scan aim to identify existing conceptualisations, opportunities and gaps in the field of student transition studies, in order to best inform the LEA Student Forums project.

⁵ Note that some of the research in the literature review is from the international context where school transition may occur at different year levels. Even so, the literature review was restricted to the 10–14 year old focus.

Literature review

The literature review aims to address the following questions:

1. What student characteristics or qualities are impacted by transition processes?
2. What factors impact on student transition processes?
3. What are the qualities of programs and resources that successfully support a transition process?

To this end, the A+, ERIC, Medline and PsycINFO databases were searched for relevant studies in the fields of education, psychology and medicine with supplementary snowball searches of article from the reference sections of pertinent articles. Research database search parameters are listed in Appendix 1.

This literature review, in line with others in the area (Boyle et al., 2018), uses social and bioecological theory as an organising framework. Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory of development is one of the most prominent examples of this type of theory (Figure 1). According to Bronfenbrenner, the key mechanism that facilitates children's development is the bidirectional interaction between the child and their environment (Tudge et al., 2009). This interaction is nested within four ecological or environmental systems. The microsystem (the contexts that the child is most commonly situated in, e.g. the home, classroom, school and peer group), the mesosystem (the interactions between microsystem contexts, e.g. interactions between the home context/parents and the school context/teachers), the exosystem (the contexts that influence a child indirectly, e.g. a parent's workplace can impact on a child via its impact on the parent) and the macrosystem (the broad socio-cultural context in which the child develops) (Swick & Williams, 2006). These four ecological systems also occur within the chronosystem, which relates to the historical events occurring in and around the four environments (Tudge, Mokrova, Hatfield & Karnik, 2009).

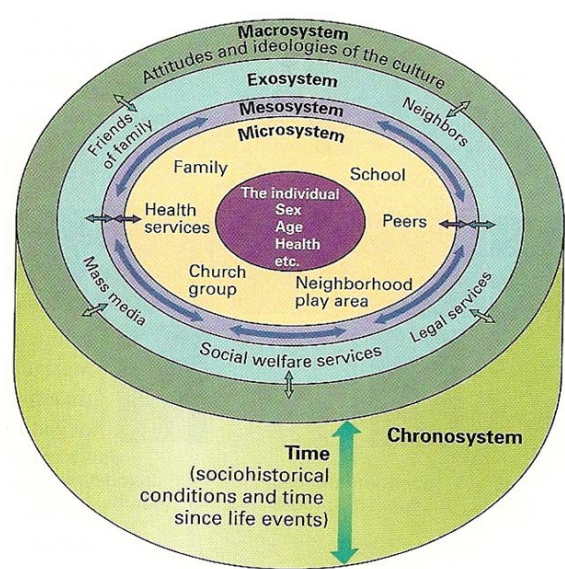


Figure 1: Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory of child development (Source: Santrock, 2014, p. 27)

For the transition from primary to secondary school, this theoretical framework highlights the multiple influences on the child including teachers, parents, and peers, the home environment in general and the climate of the school, as well as the dispositions and expectations that the child brings to their transition. It provides a conceptual basis from which risk and protective factors can be explored and from which programs and resources can be designed.

In addition to Bronfenbrenner's theory, the literature review takes the view that transition is a process and not an occasion (Williamston, 2010), even though there are clearly defined events within any transition process and timeline. Williams and Boman (2002), for example, discuss transition as a two-phase process including the transfer phase - moving from the primary to secondary school system - and the orientation phase - acclimatising to the new school setting.

Research perspectives

The literature reviewed highlighted a range of research methods that provide differing perspectives on the student experience of transition. While some studies involved more-quantitative secondary analyses of existing data, for example, research on attendance patterns after transition (Benner & Wang, 2014) or the effect of school transition on academic achievement (Felmlee et al., 2018), others focused more on the qualitative student voice to inform an understanding of the transition process. As in much qualitative research, intensity of student voice tended to be inversely proportional to the size of the student cohort used as participants. Larger scale research, for example, on connection to school (Waters et al., 2010), provides statistically robust and generalisable findings from large cohorts of students but from a more-distant perspective. Smaller scale research, for example, Johnstone (2010), Mackenzie et al. (2012) or Williams and Boman's (2002) research into students' perceptions of their high school transition, have a much greater focus on depth of student voice to contribute to the discussion.

Evaluative research that measured the impact of school transition interventions was also reviewed. Interventions included those that aimed for improved transition experiences and outcomes overall (Borman et al., 2019) as well as interventions that aimed to improve one specific aspect of schooling across the transition period, for example Bury et al. (2017) who explored an intervention designed to maintain or improve English and literacy outcomes). These types of intervention evaluations contained both quantitative and qualitative methodologies designed to measure academic and social-emotional outcomes, capture student voice, or both.

In addition, there are some significant and highly relevant research projects in Australia that produce new information regarding adolescence and student transition, and that illuminate the opportunities and challenges students face during this time. Examples include the Childhood to Adolescence Transition Study (CATS),⁶ the Longitudinal Survey of Australian Youth (LSAY)⁷ and the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC).⁸ While these research projects are critical in capturing current data on issues facing Australian children and adolescents, it must be noted that the projects do not go as far as to produce tailored resources for schools to assist with the challenges and opportunities identified. This level of resource development is left to teachers, or to other researchers or developers, to translate the research into practical resources geared to their own contexts.

⁶ <https://cats.mcrci.edu.au>

⁷ <https://www.lsay.edu.au>

⁸ <https://growingupinaustralia.gov.au>

Student outcomes impacted by the transition process

In the school environment, the criteria used to judge transition ‘success’ often vary depending on the evaluator with evidence that teachers tend to focus more on academic progress and attainment while students emphasise more the social and emotional factors in the transition process (Topping, 2011). Some researchers (Disseler, 2010) have found a particular gender bias among students in this respect, whereby girls emphasise social and emotional factors more than boys. For programs and resources that are designed to take into account student voice, these findings highlight the need to consider and address academic factors (progress, achievement, motivation and engagement) as well as social and emotional wellbeing and other affective factors when judging transition outcomes. Research has shown that both of these fields are impacted by the transition process, as elaborated in the following sections, noting that much of the research addresses both academic and wellbeing-related outcomes to some extent.

Academic outcomes, engagement and motivation

A number of studies address the impact of school transition on academic outcomes as well as other factors. For example, Goldstein et al. (2015) compare student experiences of transition-related stress with academic outcomes and affective measures, finding that higher amounts of transition stress predicted lower grades, lower connectedness to school, and increased school-related anxiety. Other studies, however, contradict the academic-decline narrative. Langenkamp (2011) points out the lack of evidence for transition, in isolation, influencing students’ academic outcomes. Instead, this research suggests that where students do show a decrease in academic achievement, it is associated with social integration difficulties or a mid-year school move.

Some researchers have investigated the impact of transition on academic progress by contrasting students’ academic performance during upper primary school with their performance in early secondary school. For instance, Hopwood et al. (2017) compared the reading performance of Tasmanian students from seven schools between their enrolment in Year 6 and Year 7. Using data from the Progressive Achievement Test in Reading (PAT-R), the study found an overall decline in students’ average reading performance from Year 6 to Year 7. However, when the data were viewed according to school groups, the decline was only statistically significant at four of the seven schools, and average reading performance increased at one school.

Carmichael (2015) examined Australian students’ mathematics performance from Year 5 to Year 7 using NAPLAN data. He compared the average growth in performance of students in Australian states where Year 7 is situated in secondary school with students in Australian states where Year 7 is in primary school. Results showed that, on average, students in Australian states that had transitioned to secondary school in Year 7 showed slightly lower growth in mathematics performance from Year 5 to Year 7. Carmichael completed further analyses using NAPLAN data for children that participated in the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC) in order to incorporate the effects of background factors. These results showed that students from schools where Year 7 was in secondary school had slightly lower mathematics performance growth, even after controlling for prior achievement and background factors such as gender, age, parent wealth and school sector.

Interruptions to academic progress or achievement during the transition period have been linked to students’ adjusting to the new curriculum and pedagogy of the secondary school system. In a three-year longitudinal study, Attard (2010) followed 20 students from Year 5 to Year 8 to explore the impact

of the transition process on students' mathematics engagement. The study emphasised student voice in its research methods using interviews and focus groups to gather the views of the participating students. Students highlighted several factors in the secondary school mathematics classroom that were different to their experiences in primary school including less cooperative work, different ways of presenting content, an increase in pace during lessons and more frequent assessments.

Levels of motivation and engagement can also change during the transition from primary to secondary school. Academic self-concept, or the way in which a student conceptualises themselves academically (Bong & Skaalvik, 2003), is a key construct that acts as a conduit for this change. Researchers have argued that this is because the frame of reference through which students' judge themselves and form their self-concept changes as they enter the secondary school system and are faced with new academic standards, new modes of learning, different expectations from teachers and a new set of peers for social and academic comparison (Becker & Neumann, 2018; Gniewosz et al., 2011). Given that academic self-concept is positively associated with achievement in primary students, and self-concept subsequently becomes a stronger predictor of achievement as students get older (Guay et al., 2003), the impact of transition on academic self-concept may be one of the pathways through which transition influences achievement and learning.

Becker & Neumann (2018) note the 'big-fish little-pond effect', originally made prominent by Marsh and Parker (1984), which describes how students' academic self-concept may change across the transition period. They note that academic self-concepts that develop in primary school, largely influenced by how students compare themselves to their peers, tend to persist into the secondary years especially in terms of general academic rather than subject-specific perceptions.

In addition to self-concept, other motivational constructs are also impacted by the transition from primary to secondary school. Some researchers note that the transition from elementary to middle school in the USA is associated with a decline in academic motivation (Goldstein et al., 2015; Towns, 2011). Goldstein and colleagues' (2015) own findings show that students who experience greater stress across the transition to middle school are at increased risk of experiencing lower academic motivation, as well as lower academic performance. Towns (2018) proposes that developing a sense of belonging to school may remedy this, as school-belonging is associated with increased academic motivation, along with other pro-social, pro-emotional and pro-academic markers.

These findings, however, may vary across schools, sectors and systems, given that Atkinson (2010) found that students who had recently transitioned to middle school in the private school system in the United States were more academically motivated post-transition than their elementary school pre-transition peers, which contrasts with findings in the US public school sector. She suggests that the increase in motivation across transition may be correlated with the private school students' high levels of school connectedness reported in the same study (Atkinson, 2010).

Social, emotional and physical wellbeing

As well as academic outcomes, studies have also highlighted the impact of the transition process on social and emotional wellbeing.

In the Australian context, a sense of connection or belonging to a school has been found to correlate with positive health and academic outcomes and has been linked to positive social and emotional wellbeing. Waters et al. (2010) indicate that the school transition phase is a significant predictor of present and future school connectedness. Their research shows, however, that a positive student

transition experience is also correlated with positive wellbeing indicators such as higher family and teacher connectedness and higher connectedness with school in the following year, more extra-curricular participation and pro-social skills, and fewer behavioural, emotional, peer and classroom problems (Waters et al., 2010). In support, Vaz and colleagues' (2015) findings show that belongingness tends to remain stable over the primary–secondary transition period and is correlated with students' backgrounds and personal attributes such as coping skills and social acceptance. In contrast, in the US context Benner and Wang (2014) found that the transition experience could partly predict whether student engagement – measured through attendance records – increased, or whether students became more disconnected.

Even though aspects of social and emotional wellbeing may remain relatively stable for individual students across the transition to secondary school, Waters et al. (2012) found that up to a third of students reported a “‘difficult’ or ‘somewhat difficult’ transition to their new school” and that these students were more likely to experience poorer social and emotional health up to a year later (Waters et al., 2012, p.196). The prominence of this correlation is reflected in the number and range of resources that focus on student wellbeing across the transition phase, as noted in the environmental scan further below.

Of some concern are the findings from research into levels of physical activity after the transition to a secondary school environment. Marks et al. (2015) observed declines in student physical activity and increases in sedentary behaviour across the primary to secondary transition. In a conceptually similar study, Rutten et al. (2014) found that even though exercise as measured by a pedometer did not particularly change, sedentary behaviours such as increased time spent on homework and recreational computer use significantly increased across the two-year period incorporating school transition. Ridley and Dollman's (2019) recent study involving a cohort of female students showed that physical activity particularly declined across the school transition period and most noticeably at break times.

Factors that impact across the transition period

A number of personal and environmental factors impact the school transition period, as reflected in Bronfenbrenner's ecological model of child development (Figure 1, earlier). These include students' academic self-concept, additional educational considerations, the social-emotional wellbeing and support available from family, friends and community, socio-economic status, and differences across primary and secondary school environments. These factors are discussed below.

The literature reviewed tended to combine two or more of these factors, acknowledging that personal and environmental factors operate in combination and are difficult to isolate for research purposes. However, many researchers also highlight the disparities present within the research literature, noting how factors such as peer support, family support, school belonging, socio-economic status, gender, ability or disability have been found to both influence *and* not influence transitions. For a comprehensive example, see Pendergast et al. (2018, pp. 9-10).

Examples of factors impacting transition

Students who require additional educational considerations may also require additional support at the point of transition. There are many examples of research that investigate the effect of transition on the students with additional requirements, most notably students who are neuro-diverse (Berry, 2019; Buchanan et al., 2016; Hebron, 2018; Zendarski, 2017), and which offer ideas for interventions to assist

these students in adjusting to a new school environment (Deacy et al., 2015; Mandy et al., 2015), as well as systematic reviews from Nuske et al. (2019) and Richter et al. (2019).

Students' social-emotional wellbeing has been shown to be a factor that both influences transition and is influenced by transition (this latter noted above). Maguire & Yu (2014) analysed data from the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC) and found that the emotional and behavioural problems that students brought to their new schools were a strong predictor of transition problems. Their study found that a student's level of persistence was the most influential aspect of temperament in determining a successful transition to secondary school, and that the most common difficulty in the immediate post-transition phase was that of establishing new peer networks. Pendergast and colleagues (2018) note the importance of social support, including that from family, friends and school, as a major protective factor against depression during the transition phase. Waters et al. (2014) research supports this theory of positivity, concluding that students who are already well-supported by peers, school and family tend to both expect and experience a positive transition.

Socio-economic status (SES) has also been found to influence the transition experience. Vaz and colleagues (2014) note that students from lower SES backgrounds showed lower academic competence and mental health functioning overall than their more affluent peers, and that this was consistent across Australian primary and secondary schools. Studies in similar countries (USA and UK) appear to confirm that students from lower SES backgrounds tend to experience more challenges at transition (West et al., 2010).

Critiques of school structures that create a need for transition per se, whether locational or pedagogical are also represented in the literature. Vaz (2010) comments that these issues, namely, that changing school campuses during adolescence and moving from a child-centred primary school to an achievement centred secondary school are both potentially stressful occurrences that can contribute to transition difficulties (p.108). Other researchers note the differences in impact on students transitioning at different ages (Holas and Huston, 2012 who researched students transitioning at fifth versus sixth grade), at different times to their peers (Langenkamp, 2011), or propose that less transitions – namely, using K–8 instead of K–5 then 6–8 – could assist in reducing negative school outcomes (Hensley, 2009).

Summary

While a number of personal and environmental factors impact the school transition period in the Australian context, researchers note that some influencing factors tend to remain stable. For example, Vaz and colleagues (2015) note that students' backgrounds and personal attributes tend to stay stable across the move from primary to secondary, as does their sense of belongingness to school. While this can subsequently result in generally positive transition outcomes for students who already experience socio-educational advantage, positive social-emotional wellbeing and connection to school, there is scope for schools to intervene where students do not experience these advantages, or where students could potentially benefit from opportunities to develop their skills related to managing and leveraging change.

Despite the notable focus on at-risk students and approaches to transition research from a deficit perspective (namely, investigating or compensating for what students or schools lack), some researchers particularly emphasise the finding that transition is generally positive for the majority of students (Maguire & Yu, 2014; Williams & Boman, 2002). While Williams and Boman (2002) note that

the process of adapting to the structural differences of the secondary system (e.g. larger school, different curriculum and school climate) is demanding, they argue that the notion of transition as 'inevitably negative' should be questioned. Reappraising transition as a challenge that can be met, rather than focusing on a deficit model, resonated within the feedback from students that participated in their study. This idea of building upon students' existing strengths is a key opportunity for the LEA transitions project.

Qualities of resources and programs that successfully support the transition process

To gain an appreciation of resources and programs that support the transition process, a number of quality indicators were identified in the research literature reviewed. These quality indicators elaborate on the *personal/social*, *procedural*, and *academic* components (Astbury, 2011) that need to be considered during the transition phase. These quality indicators are elaborated below.

Towns (2018) highlights the importance of the following program contents, with an emphasis on the socio-emotional domain:

- Encouragement of a sense of belonging,
- Elements that help decrease anxiety levels for students in general, and,
- Elements that can be individually tailored to student needs, including those targeted to at-risk students.

This identification of, and focus on, students in categories of risk has arisen consistently in the literature reviewed earlier, including specific considerations for students with social, emotional or behavioural challenges, learning or other ability challenges, or students coming from lower socio-economic or educational backgrounds (Berry, 2019; Buchanan et al., 2016; Deacy et al., 2015; Hebron, 2018; Mandy et al., 2015; Pendergast et al., 2018; Vaz et al., 2014; Zendarski, 2017).

Further elements that have emerged as useful transition program content are:

- Collaboration between primary and secondary schools that includes sharing of student data (Warner, 2019),
- Parent engagement, for example, the provision of useful and accurate school information, active involvement in the transition process (Sun, 2015; Van Ryzin et al., 2012),
- Student engagement, for example, orientation visits to the secondary school, peer support through a mentoring or buddy system (Benner et al., 2017; Campbell, 2010),
- Inclusion of the student voice in the design of the transition program (Williams & Boman, 2002).

The quality indicators identified in the literature review were referred to during the environmental scan – a review of existing resources and programs designed to support the transition process in the Australian context. The environmental scan is explained next; Attachment 1 provides an overview of the resources and programs available. An analysis of these existing materials, with reference to the reviewed literature, is provided at the end of the environmental scan, in *Analysis of existing programs and resources*.

Environmental scan

To complement the literature review, ACER completed an environmental scan of existing programs and resources aimed at easing the transition from primary to secondary school. The objective was to identify best practice as well as relevant gaps and opportunities for new resources and programs that focus on assisting in this significant transition. This will ensure that any products produced as a result of recommendations from the student forums build on and improve the resources available to schools, parents and systems and do not replicate those in existence.

The full list of programs and resources reviewed is shown in Attachment 1. As the access location is also shown in Attachment 1, these are not replicated in the reference list.

Search parameters

The following search terms were used for this environmental scan.

Population

Primary to secondary/high school; middle years; Year 6-8; ages 10-14; adolescents; youth; young people; teens.

Given the literature suggests that certain groups of students may require slightly different foci during transition, attention was also given to identifying some resources and programs that are relevant to students with additional or alternate needs (e.g. disability, Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander or language background other than English).

Topics

Transition; wellbeing; starting high school; student perceptions; social-emotional

Resources

Resource; program; professional learning; support; guidelines; strategy; evaluation

Location

Given the Australian target audience for LEA products and services, the search focussed on Australian sources and programs.

Scan

An initial search of Australian Government education websites was conducted, as well as a search of the individual state and territory government education websites. This list was reviewed and relevant resources were identified leading to a snowball search of various other web sources. Each Catholic diocese education office was also searched for the term 'transition'. Further Google searches of key terms were conducted and the first five pages were scanned and reviewed for relevance and duplication (see Appendix 2). Results from the literature review were also appraised for relevant programs and resources. Resources and programs that were considered to be pertinent to the objective of the environment scan were recorded.

Five main types of resources and programmes to support transitions from primary to secondary school emerge from the environmental scan and resource review. Examples of each type are considered in more detail in this section. Attachment 1 provides a complete list of programs and resources identified, including publication details.

1. Practical resources & programs
2. Theoretical resources
3. School-specific resources/programs
4. Teacher professional development
5. Action research

1. Practical resources & programs

The first group of products available to schools to address the transition from primary to secondary school are practical resources and programs. These can be defined as a resource or program with some practical aspect designed for implementation in schools and the classroom such as lesson plans, student worksheets, learning outcomes or handbooks. The practical resources and programs are often aimed at students in Year 6 and/or 7, their teachers and/or parents, with some also extending to year level coordinators and other school staff. Most resources are applicable to transition students in general while others have a focus on specific risk groups (for example, AllPlayTMLearn⁹, which serves young people with developmental challenges or disability) or have a particular outcome focus (for example, ReachOut¹⁰, which focuses on mental health). Some are freely available while others require payment or membership for full access. It is difficult to determine the effectiveness of these types of programs and resources and to what extent schools are using them, as independent evaluations are rare.

A selection of some of the more notable practical programs and resource that were identified are summarised below.

Victorian Department of Education

The Victorian Department of Education offers schools several resources for the primary to secondary transition. While access to some materials is restricted to Victorian government schools, many of the resources are available to any school and/or parents.

The main, freely accessible, relevant practical resources and programs are listed in Table 1.

⁹ <https://allplaylearn.org.au/>

¹⁰ <https://au.reachout.com/>

Table 1: Main practical resources and programs available from Victorian Department of Education

Resource/program	Description
A Toolkit for Transition Clusters: primary to secondary	A set of tools designed to support groups of schools that are geographically close to work together and develop a strategy for primary to secondary transitions. It includes nine tools, covering topics such as data analysis or establishing priorities and frameworks. The tools are available as separate documents on their website.
Transition for students with a disability	A document outlining important considerations and practical advice on addressing the needs of students with disabilities during their transition. There are suggested timelines, checklists and templates to assist schools to improve their processes for this group of students. Links to student support programs and additional resources is also provided.
Student Transition and Resilience Training (START)	This is a complete, free, training program/resource for teachers and includes all required support material for students (e.g. workbooks and handouts). It is aimed at supporting students to reflect and develop personally as they transition from primary to secondary school. For example, it includes strategies to improve resilience and learning and address wellbeing needs. The resource was designed in collaboration with a clinical psychologist and using current research.

Joining the Dots –Transition guide for schools

The Joining the Dots program began as an action research project (run over six years from 2012-2017) that implemented and evaluated a primary to secondary transition program. The program emphasises collaboration between schools, students, parents and the community sector. Research from the project was used to develop several resources and tools to assist and guide the transition process. The most relevant to schools is a *JTD Transition Guide for Schools*. The resource is a comprehensive document with embedded links to further resources for schools to implement the Joining the Dots Transitional Model. This model incorporates five key dimensions: organising and resourcing, sharing knowledge and practice, family and community engagement and student voice. The transition guide leads schools through each dimension and contains activities, resources, and practical guidelines on how to implement the model in their school.

Reach Out – Transition to Secondary School

ReachOut is a resource for schools, parents and young people to support student wellbeing. It focuses on helping teachers to build relationships with students and to respond to individual student wellbeing needs in a holistic way. ReachOut resources are offered free of charge and are designed to be adapted to the needs of students. While ReachOut is not a specific program for the transition to secondary school, many of their resources are applicable to the middle years phase. ReachOut have structured and mapped their material to enable schools to effectively access resources relevant to this phase.

The resources available address typical student concerns across this period. For example, issues related to bullying, academic pressure and increased work load, feelings of loneliness and navigating around a new school. For example, selecting *Finding my way around school* offers tips for schools to support students operationally (to navigate their new environment) and emotionally (to manage stress and

anxiety). There are classroom activities to support these tips, for example, *Acceptance* aims to teach students how to cope with things that are out of their control. This activity is linked to a downloadable/printable lesson plan for teachers to implement complete with learning intentions, key outcomes, instructions, materials needed and how it is mapped to the Australia Curriculum.

There are some evaluations available on the ReachOut website, however, these are related to the whole wellbeing program and not specifically about the effectiveness of the resources in supporting the transition process.

Kids Help Line - Transition to High School

Kids Help Line @ School offers a social and emotional program facilitated by a counsellor to all schools Australia wide. This service is supported by the Bupa Health Foundation and offered to schools free of charge. They provide a once-off, 45-minute session for school groups on transition, coping with change and strengthening crucial skills via an interactive video conference. The session covers topics such as making friends, strategies for staying calm, managing workload and study pressures, seeking help and the importance of organisation. The Kids Help Line website also includes a free activity sheet for students, which describes some transition to high school scenarios and examples of productive ways to deal with peer pressure.

Catholic School Parents Australia - Gearing up for Parent Engagement in Student Learning toolkit

The Gearing up for Parent Engagement in Student Learning toolkit is an online resource for parents and schools aimed at helping to make the transition process a positive experience for students. It emphasises the importance of the relationship between home and school through 22 online or downloadable modules. There are separate resources for primary and secondary parents, principals and school staff aimed at improving student learning and wellbeing. For example, the suite available to *primary principals and school staff* cover topics such as welcoming families, sharing good practice and facing challenges together. While much of the content of the modules are theoretical, additional ideas and resources are suggested which could include practical classroom and/or school activities.

Sharon Witt - Transition to high school curriculum

Sharon Witt is a secondary teacher, author and presenter to young people and their parents. She offers a transition to high school curriculum aimed at senior primary and junior secondary teachers, at a cost of \$220. It includes customisable lesson plans, activities and resource sheets on topics such as, fears about change, primary school reflections, friendship and practical information for the first few days of high school. Teachers can select lessons that are most relevant for their students.

Jenny Atkinson – Sparks Education

Jenny Atkinson conducts an interactive, once off workshop with Year 6 students (available at \$18 per student). The workshop focuses on easing anxieties and building confidence in relation to their transition. Jenny surveyed 1600 students to find out their thoughts on the transition process and subsequently developed the workshop, based on survey findings and relevant research literature. There are separate, optional seminars for parents and schools. A supplementary online support portal is soon to be available to students/schools for an additional cost, which aims to provide ongoing support to students throughout the transition phase and beyond the two-hour workshop.

2. Theoretical resources

The second type of resource available to schools to support the transition from primary to secondary school are theoretical resources. These, as well as the school-specific resources/programs (next section), are the most abundant type of resources found during the environmental scan. They include webpages, reports, webinars, podcasts and videos aimed at providing an overview of issues and considerations relevant to the transition from primary to secondary school. The resources are intended for parents and students in Years 6 and 7 as well as for teachers and schools. While these resources are easily and freely accessible, they differ from the practical programs and resources (previous section) as they do not offer activities or guides that can be immediately implemented in schools. They do, however, provide overviews of important aspects of the transition and give an introduction to the issues facing students as they begin secondary school. Most of these resources are applicable to the general student population while some resources are specifically aimed at particular groups of students (for example, students with a disability).

Some examples of these resources are described in Table 2.

Table 2: Examples of theoretical resources on the transition from primary to secondary school

Source /Author	Type	Description
Be You Australian Department of Health	Webpage & webinar	BeYou have a webpage outlining the importance of a successful transition aimed at parents and teachers. It covers understanding student behaviour (e.g. the impact of puberty and typical emotions associated with transition), the importance of strong relationships between children, their families and teachers, and external links to other transition resources. The BeYou website also includes a recording of a webinar aimed at primary and secondary teachers. It provides information to support students, parents and teachers through the transition phase.
Student Wellbeing Hub, Australian Department of Education, Skills and Employment	Podcast	The Student Wellbeing Hub have a podcast available on their website titled, <i>Understanding the Middle Years</i> . The podcast is with Professor George Patton, the principal investigator of the Childhood to Adolescence Transition Study (CATS), talking about health and emotional development in middle years with some discussion on how this relates to transition.
Raising Children Network	Webpage	Raising Children Network have a webpage <i>Starting secondary school</i> that includes information aimed at parents to help prepare and support their child during their transition to secondary school. It covers what to expect starting secondary school, how to prepare, friends and feelings, and typical signs that a child might be having difficulties at secondary school.
Catholic Diocese of Wollongong	Webpage & video	A resource for parents, including a video and author Glynis Kozma's top 10 tips for preparing students for secondary school that are also presented in the book, <i>Secondary School: A Parent's Guide</i> . The tips cover topics including building self-confidence, listening to fears, being a good friend, being positive and operational skills.

Source /Author	Type	Description
ACT Education Department	Video	This video presents a variety of school community members (e.g. students, teacher, parents) describing their experiences transitioning from primary to secondary school.
Little Rockers Radio	Podcast	This podcast, <i>From primary to high school</i> , is a round table discussion between primary and lower secondary students about transitioning to high school. This discussion provides understanding into what students think is crucial for students to know during their transition.
ACER Teacher Magazine	Online magazine article	Authors Donna Cross and Leanne Lester describe a thematic analysis of interviews with 20 principals in WA. They identify 10 key strategies to effectively help students through the transition process.
School TV – The Geelong College	Videos, articles, resources	School TV is an online resource aimed at empowering parents with reliable information and support. One of their monthly topics is school transitions. The webpage has interviews with leading specialists on areas such as how parents can support children, predicting wellbeing in Year 7, and signs a child is having problems transitioning. There are also links to further articles, for example, tips for surviving high school, advice for students starting secondary school and fact sheets.

3. School-specific resources/programs

The third type of resource is that developed within a particular school. These school-specific resources and programs are often available on the school's website. They may present basic theoretical information, a description of the main components of their transition program, or both. Typically, these resources and programs are too context-specific to allow other schools to directly adopt the program, however, the common themes and activities presented do point to evidence of best practice and are often adaptable to other school contexts. School transition programs often include primary/secondary school staff visits, orientation days and parent/family information nights in Year 6, and peer support programs and orientation camps in Year 7. Some examples are provided in Table 3 and further below.

Table 3: Examples of school-specific transition resources and programs

School Name	Description
Rutherglen High School	This school presents a handbook for new students, which includes a description of their transition program. It focuses on enhancing social networks to build confidence and feelings of support. The school offers several transition days, activities, information sessions, social events and an orientation camp to encourage students to build connections with the school and each other.
Northcote High School	This school's website outlines the main aspects of their transition program which focusses on enhancing students' feelings of safety happiness and connectedness. Activities described to promote these feeling include a Year 7 parent information session, orientation days, regular communication with parents, a peer support program, and an orientation camp. Transition is also monitored by the student wellbeing team.
South Oakleigh College	This school identifies a Transition Coordinator on staff who facilitates a three-stage transition program described on the website. Stage 1 includes primary school visits to the College and vice versa, as well as a Year 7 induction program. This program focuses on the physical and emotional needs of students by cultivating a safe and connected environment. Stage 2 includes open nights, orientation days and information sessions for parents and students. Stage 3 centres around Year 7 activities and includes a peer support program, a parent/family meet and greet, and academic preliminary testing and monitoring of students by wellbeing and management teams.
The Basin Primary School	A brief summary of the main transition activities is provided on the school's website. This includes class discussions and activities, visits to neighbouring secondary schools, Year 7 classroom experiences, visits from secondary school staff, notification of official open days/information nights at secondary schools, and preparation of Year 7 student portfolios.
Ringwood Secondary College	An overview of the transition program is described, which focuses on students' sense of belonging. The program includes visits to primary schools, parent/family information nights and an orientation day. Once students are in Year 7 they participate in a range of activities aimed at increasing connectedness and belonging.

School Name	Description
Baldivis Secondary School	The schools website provides some general information about the types of changes students face when starting secondary school as well as the basic formula of their transition program. It includes student talks at previous primary schools, secondary school visits to primary schools, Year 6 visits to secondary schools, orientation days and peer support systems.

Recognition of one particular school's exemplary transition program for students in their middle years was presented by Quirk (2017). This paper provides an overview of the main aspects of the school's transition project. The paper notes that the overall aim of the program is to nurture the holistic development of students. This particular college was a combined school (Foundation to Year 12) with most students moving from their own junior to middle school between Year 6 and 7, with only some students from external schools. The school has adopted a long term, multi-phase transition program starting at the beginning of Year 6 and extending it into Year 7. The program includes:

- Teacher visits to primary schools to discuss uncertainties and increase awareness (Terms 1/2, Year 6);
- Year 6 students visit the middle school where they meet teachers and get introduced to new processes such as timetables (Term 2, Year 6);
- A group transition extended visit composed of a five-week program where small groups of Year 6 students attend Year 7 classes, followed by a question and answer session with the middle school coordinator (Term 4, Year 6);
- A Year 7 orientation day (Term 4, Year 6);
- Before the start of the school year, Year 7 parents and students meet with their homeroom teacher for a 'profile meeting' (pre-Term 1, Year 7);
- Following the start of Year 7, implementation of a peer support program between Year 7 students and Year 10 students (ongoing, Year 7);
- A Year 7 Parent Information Evening and Picnic (Term 1, Year 7);
- A Year 7 Orientation Camp (Term 1, Year 7);

A second, earlier example of a school transition program was presented by Campbell (2010), who at the time was Head of Year 7 at an Anglican school in Brisbane. Campbell (2010) stresses the importance of parents, teachers and schools being positive about the transition process as this helps to shape the transition pathway for students. The article describes best practice techniques for Year 7 students, centred on four main themes/issues that represent the most frequent concern for students. These include being lost, dealing with lockers, being late for class and an increased workload. Campbell also provides an overview of the topics that are included in the school's orientation program for parents and students. These included physiological, emotional and mental student characteristics, needs of the adolescent, differences between primary and secondary school, behaviour management, operational matters and staffing.

4. Teacher professional development

A smaller group of resources available to teachers and schools to assist with the transition process are professional development programs and resources. While access is often restricted to schools/teachers with a registered account (for example, the Northern Territory Department of Education requires a school login to see what resources and training are available), there appear to be some programs on the theme of transitions that are freely accessible. These training programs are useful for helping teachers to learn about factors pertinent to students during the transition process. Below are some examples.

- The Queensland Government offers state schools access to a professional learning program called *Teaching Junior Secondary program*. This program is aimed at teachers who are new to teaching Year 7 and introduces them to the skills needed to support young adolescents.
- The Bastow Institute of Teachers offer an online course called *The Adolescent Learner* aimed at secondary school teachers. This once-off, 40-minute session indirectly covers issues relevant to secondary school transition and looks at adolescent neurology and factors that might impact on their learning.
- The Centre for Professional Learning offers a full day conference (\$250) on *Fostering academic growth and social capability*. The emphasis is on the specific needs of students as they transition from primary to secondary school and how to successfully enhance student learning in Year 5 and 6.

5. Action research

The literature review presented further above demonstrates that academic research on the transition from primary-secondary school is a valuable resource for schools and teachers as it identifies factors that are impacted by transition as well as emphasising that other factors can influence the transition process. The research reviewed also indicates that the importance of certain factors varies for different student populations and/or student characteristics. However, it is often difficult for teachers and schools to translate the research directly into classroom practice.

There are certainly examples of researchers and teachers who translate existing findings into practice, or generate their own research findings, through action research in the classroom. In the transition context, this could be researching or evaluating transition programs per se (Durant, 2009; Hahn, 2009), or using transition as an indirect content driver (Damon, 2015; Yeager et al., 2016). To further explain the latter, Damon (2015) investigated the impact of project-based learning, using the development of a transition program as content. The teacher invited his class to engage in a project that would assist other students with their transition into secondary school. Damon's research article focuses on how project-based learning positively affected student voice, engagement, connectedness, collaboration and agency, which is not necessarily directly useful for the transition process. However, the indirect information generated about transition programs developed by students is likely to be highly useful for other teachers and schools. These programs included initiatives such as new student surveys, information to new students as part of a more-comprehensive welcome pack, a welcome film, guide to using school resources including laptops, getting-to-know-you activities, and a homework guide.

These examples of translation of research into practice, however, are not yet a consistent endeavour in schools: they are generated by teachers engaging in university-level research rather than occurring as a daily practice in schools. This is also where the opportunity exists for the LEA project – to step into the transfer gap between educational research and classroom practice by developing evidence-based resources that practical and immediately useable by teachers in a classroom setting.

Summary

Five main types of products are available to help schools support students through their middle years and transition into secondary school. These include practical resources and programs, theoretical resources, school-specific resources, teacher professional development opportunities and action research papers. Most of these resources are theoretical with only some providing practical guides or activities that can be directly implemented in schools.

Analysis of existing programs and resources

The main purpose of the environmental scan was to identify quality practice, as well as to identify relevant gaps and opportunities for transition resources and programs. It is at this stage that the evaluative indicators identified in the literature review can be applied to the resources and programs identified in the environmental scan. Attachment 1 provides both access information and the evaluative indicators as relevant to each program or resource.

The set of evaluative indicators that were established to review resources and programs were drawn from the research literature reviewed. The evaluative indicators aim to highlight where there are successes or gaps in how programs and resources currently support the primary to secondary school transition.

The evaluative indicators include:

Success markers (goals of the program or resource)

- Academic outcomes
- Social or emotional wellbeing outcomes (including engagement, motivation)
- Operational skills (including school procedures, navigation)

Program scope markers

- Target audience – schools, students, parents, teachers, combination of these
- Whether the program or resource clearly includes:
 - Collaborative links between the primary and secondary schools
 - Parent engagement practices
 - Student engagement practices (e.g. participation, agency)
 - Peer support (e.g. student mentoring, buddy systems)

Program or resource elements that target at-risk students or students with additional needs are usually not identified, unless directly designed or produced by a specific group (e.g. Autism Tasmania). While these program elements are clearly important, they are not always explicitly identified within programs and resources. Special consideration for at-risk students, for example, is often kept to an internal school level, which is the reason for its non-inclusion as an indicator of quality in Attachment 1.

Success markers and program scope markers have been assigned on face-value, that is, what was accessible and visible at the time of review. As many of the resources are online and 'live', it is accepted that they are subject to change, particularly for example, those shown as school-specific programs.

Gaps in provision

Based on the content of the environmental scan and evaluations of existing resources and programs the following gaps have been identified and confirmed to be relevant for the LEA project.

Translating research into practice

While the reviewed research literature describes what is considered as quality practice in the field of student transition, and captures student voice through large-scale surveys and small-scale interviews and focus groups, this knowledge and understanding is not always immediately transferable to a classroom context. This presents a clear opportunity for LEA in the subsequent resource development stage of the Student Forums project, in that LEA resources can clearly leverage the evidence base and bridge the gap between research and classroom practice.

For example, the research literature overwhelmingly focuses on specific factors that impact transition, often from a deficit perspective. Since LEA resources aim to cater for a diverse audience, there is clear opportunity incorporate the multitude of impacting factors from the literature review and develop resources from a positive perspective. This could be effected through, for example, presenting transition as one sort of a multitude of changes students will meet in their lives, and consider strategies and skills for meeting these challenges.

Student voice

The resources and programs identified in the environmental scan suggest that direct student voice is generally not used in resource development¹¹. While there is a significant amount of student voice captured and presented in the research literature, including voices of students requiring additional support, it is unclear whether this has been used in the development of the programs and resources presented in Attachment 1. Of course, this does not necessarily detract from the inherent quality of programs and resources, it simply indicates an opportunity gap.

This is a key opportunity for LEA, and the clear intent of the Student Forums project, as student voice captured in the forums can be directly transferred to programs and resources developed. The intent to capture voices of students that represent the diversity of students in Australia is critical to ensure LEA can include and accommodate student needs in future resource development.

¹¹ Or, it is not made explicit. Resources and programs are generally a final product and do not contain developmental information. However, the majority of resources identified in the scan are written and implemented from an adult perspective.

Section Two: Method

The literature review and environmental scan indicated gaps and overlaps in existing knowledge and programs related to school transition. As noted in that section, existing knowledge and understanding is not always immediately transferable to a particular classroom context, resources are not always developed from a positive perspective - as contrasting with a 'deficit' perspective - and student voice is generally not evident in resource development. Subsequent to the literature review and environmental scan, the student forums¹² were intentionally designed to help address these gaps in knowledge and transferability.¹³

Interview forums are *organised discussions* (Gibbs, 2012) that elicit information about a given topic in a group environment. The information is elicited through qualitative and quantitative question prompts, similar to those used in written surveys. The dynamic of a focus group, however, allows for discussion of the topic among participants, which in turn allows the researcher to clarify meanings (Kelly, 2003) and seek a greater depth of response from participants, where needed. This method is particularly useful with children, who often appreciate the guidance towards how little or how much to contribute.

Student forum question prompts and activities were therefore designed to incorporate elements of research data collection while remaining accessible for the target demographic of students, namely students from Year 5 through to 8, or from about 10- to 14-years old. This implied that the forums needed to be designed from both the research and student perspective. The research perspective built upon the knowledge and understandings gleaned from the literature review and environmental scan, while not reproducing existing approaches, as well as directly addressing LEA's research questions around gaining an understanding of:

- Contemporary issues faced by students in middle school
- Potential knowledge gaps
- Preferred methods of student learning and engagement¹⁴

The student perspective was included, developed and refined through the direct input of students themselves. Namely, students from the target demographic were involved in the piloting, development and review of forum materials and activities.

The student forums project aimed to capture information from at least 250 students¹⁵ with a range of diverse backgrounds, to be reflective of student voice across Australia. A generous sample of 20 schools that reflected this diversity was selected, with invitations sent to request participation in the project.

In any group discussion environment – student forums, in this case – careful consideration must be given to the selection of participants, the forum environment and content, forum leadership, analysis and reporting (Krueger & Casey, 2001). Each of these elements is discussed in this report section, including details of the target population, sampling of schools and students, design and development of student forums and the ethics processes required to conduct research in schools in Australia.

¹² The Student Forum method was requested by DESE and LEA as Stage 1 of the Being Healthy Being Active project.

¹³ Stage 2 of the Being Healthy Being Active project will address the gap in resourcing.

¹⁴ From the Life Education Australia Being Healthy Being Active project plan.

¹⁵ Minimum student number provided by DESE.

Target population

The student forum sessions were designed specifically for Year 6 and Year 7 students (± 1 Year level, if necessary) in order to capture students' ideas and opinions about their own school transition experiences. In Australia, Year 6¹⁶ is usually the last year of primary school before students transition into secondary school, though some F-12 schools implement a middle school model in Years 6 to 9 or similar. Targeting the student forum sessions to Years 6 and 7 students achieved an optimal point of data collection, given that these students were in the year level immediately before or after school transition.

Sampling of schools

The ACER sampling team drew upon international standards in sampling design to identify a sample of schools for the Student Forums project. This included the use of an up-to-date sampling frame for Australia and detailed descriptions of the population of interest.

The ACER sampling frame, containing all schools in Australia, was used to identify the population of interest for this project, namely, students at the end of primary and beginning of secondary school (Years 5–8). This population was then described in terms of the variables considered to be related to the transition experience (for example, gender, SES, school location) in as much detail as possible. Based on this comprehensive description of the population, a sample of 20 schools¹⁷ was drawn to reflect two main aims:

Sampling aim 1: To reflect the population as much as possible.

Sampling aim 2: To reflect the diversity of schools in Australia.

Through this sampling method, the selected forum sites reflected a purposefully heterogeneous sample of 20 schools in Australia that teach students in the target population. This selection of schools was then confirmed according to variable identification, population scoping, priority adjustments, replacements, and coverage, as described below. Invitations to schools only proceeded once the research ethics application for the school's jurisdiction had been approved.

Key variable identification

Schools were purposefully selected to reflect the population of schools that teach students in Year 5-8 and the diversity of schools in Australia. To this end, the key sampling variables used included:

- Metropolitan and non-metropolitan (rural/regional/remote) areas
- School sector (Catholic, Government and Independent)
- Locational SES (according to SEIFA measures)¹⁸

¹⁶ South Australia is the only remaining exception to this: Year 6 will be the uppermost year of primary school, in all school sectors, from the 2022 school year.

¹⁷ Gibbs (2012) notes that it is always best to over-recruit to allow for non-attendance. 20 schools was double the number of schools required to interview the minimum number of students (i.e., at least one class of 25 students per school).

¹⁸ SEIFA is the Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas, published by the Australian Bureau of Statistics. In this report, SES is represented by the decile numbers of 1 (lowest) to 10 (highest), and refers to the geographical location of a school. <https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/by%20Subject/2033.0.55.001~2016~Main%20Features~SEIFA%20Basics~5>

- Primary, secondary and combined/area schools

Ancillary sampling variables included the percentage of students identifying as Aboriginal, students with a language background other than English, representation within state/territory,¹⁹ and school size. The aim was to create a school sample that was also reflective of these variables, though with greater allowances for difference.

Population scoping (Sampling aim 1)

Students in Years 5-8 were the target population for the Student Forums, that is, the final two years of primary school and the first two years of secondary school.²⁰ The ACER sampling team obtained a count of all students in this population across Australia, disaggregated by the aforementioned key variables. This process resulted in a detailed description of the population in terms of the distribution of students (i.e. Years 5-8 in Australia) across the key variables. This population scoping ensured that the first main aim of the sample was met.

Priority adjustments (Sampling aim 2)

The sampling team ensured that key voices required in the Student Forums, those identified through ancillary sampling variables, were reflected in the sample. When schools agreed to participate in the forums, they were explicitly asked to ensure that students from all variable groups were encouraged to attend.

In addition to ensuring the ancillary sampling variables were as reflective of the Australian population as possible, the final sampling process also needed to particularly account for COVID-19 related restrictions that were in force in late 2020 and between January and May 2021.

- At the time of submitting the project ethics applications, the Department for Education and Training in Victoria had placed a hold on all applications until 2021. This directly affected the LEA Student Forums project, which was scheduled to proceed in Terms 1 and 2, 2021. A sampling frame without Victorian schools was therefore used in the knowledge that schools in other states – particularly some in NSW – had similar characteristics to the Victorian schools.
- Some schools in the sample were affected by COVID-19-related state border, school and office closures²¹. Both ACER and participating schools were, fortunately, able to schedule the school visits around many of these restrictions.

All priority adjustments made addressed the second sampling aim, ensuring that the sample reflected the diversity of schools in Australia as much as possible.

Replacements

Each of the schools in the sample had at least two ‘matched’ replacement schools. This was so that if the first school identified was unable to participate, a school that matched on each key variable was asked to participate in the Student Forums instead.

¹⁹ Representation within states/territories was also dependent on ongoing and shifting COVID-19 related restrictions in effect over the duration of the project.

²⁰ Note that most Government primary schools in South Australia include Year 7 in 2021.

²¹ For example, independent schools in Western Australia were replaced with matched schools in New South Wales due to WA’s lockdown in February 2021. WA independent schools were later reinstated, post-lockdown.

Intended school sample

Table 4 shows the characteristics of the intended school sample, broken down by the key variables. In line with the sampling aims, the characteristics of the intended school sample are to have a good mix in terms of school type, geographical location, school sector, and socio-economic status. Regarding the coverage in terms of States, a decision was made early in the design phase to exclude the Territories and Tasmania and to focus on the mainland States of Australia due to time and financial constraints. The reason for ultimately also excluding Victoria were the restrictions to undertake research in Victorian schools due to COVID (see above).

Table 4: Characteristics of the intended school sample (N=20)

	n	% in sample
School type:		
Primary	6	30
Secondary	8	40
Combined	6	30
Geographical Location:		
Major Cities	10	50
Regional	6	30
Remote	4	20
Sector:		
Catholic	4	20
Government	13	65
Independent	3	15
State:		
New South Wales	8	40
Queensland	5	25
South Australia	5	25
Western Australia	2	10
Socio-economic status based on SEIFA*:		
Low (1-3)	7	35
Medium (4-7)	6	30
High (8-10)	7	35

*Decile 1 is lowest and decile 10 is highest.

Achieved school sample

Fifteen schools in Australia accepted ACER's invitation to participate in the Student Transition Forums. This formed the achieved sample.

The forums were administered in-person by the ACER research team over a 12-week period between March and May 2021 (Terms 1 and 2). Two ACER researchers led each forum, usually in alternating roles of 'leader' and 'recorder'. Six forums were attended by Life Education Australia or Kantar staff for observation purposes.

Table 5 shows an overview of the characteristics of the schools that agreed to participate. The table demonstrates coverage of key sampling variables (school type, location, sector, and SES) as well as one²² of the ancillary sampling variables (state) which were identified as important to capture in this project. As can be seen, the two sampling aims - namely to reflect the Australian population as much as possible, and to reflect the diversity of schools in Australia - were achieved. The achieved school sample reflected the intended sample across all key sampling variables.

Table 5: Characteristics of the achieved sample (n=15)

	N	% achieved sample	% intended sample
School type:			
Primary	6	40	30
Secondary	5	33	40
Combined	4	27	30
Geographical Location:			
Major Cities	7	47	50
Regional	5	33	30
Remote	3	20	20
Sector:			
Catholic	4	27	20
Government	9	60	65
Independent	2	13	15
State:			
New South Wales	7	47	40
Queensland	3	20	25
South Australia	4	27	25
Western Australia	1	7	10
Socio-economic status based on SEIFA*:			
Low (1-3)	6	40	35
Medium (4-7)	4	27	30
High (8-10)	5	33	35

*Decile 1 is lowest socio-economic status and decile 10 is highest.

Sampling of students

Once a school's participation was confirmed, the school was asked to nominate one or two classes as follows:

- Primary schools nominated a Year 6 class (Year 6 and/or 7 in SA Government schools)
- Secondary schools nominated a Year 7 class (Year 8 in SA Government schools)

²² Further identification of ancillary variables here (school size, percentage of students identifying as Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander, and/or with a language background other than English) may compromise school confidentiality.

- Combined/area schools nominated two classes, one upper primary and one lower secondary, similar to the configurations above.

It is acknowledged that the school's nomination of students to participate in the student forums might have led to some selection bias in terms of who the school deemed to be better suited for this purpose (for example, nominating a particular Year 6 class over another). In addition, attendance at the forums was dependent on students having returned their completed consent form to participate. However, it was decided that the selection of students by schools was preferable to the disruption that would have resulted from ACER insisting on a school list of all students in the target population from which to select students at random.

Achieved student sample

Table 6 shows the mix of students who participated in the forums in terms of the characteristics on which information was collected in the student booklets. Nationally there are six percent²³ of students in this age range who identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander and 51 percent²⁴ are male students. There are 10 percent²⁵ of 5 to 14 year olds nationally who have a disability, defined as any limitation, restriction or impairment which restricts everyday activities and has lasted, or is likely to last, for at least six months. Data from TIMSS 2019²⁶ indicates that 19 percent of Year 4 students and 9 percent of Year 8 students either never or sometimes speak English at home. The percentages for Year 8 students are shown in the table below. While these national proportions differ slightly from those presented in Table 3, it demonstrates a diverse coverage of students across Australia in line with the project aim of obtaining diversity of student voice on the issue of transition from primary to secondary school.

Table 6: Characteristics of the achieved student sample (n=444)

	N	% of sample	% National
Gender:			
Male	172	39	51
Female	256	58	49
Non-binary	8	2	-
Prefer not to say	8	2	-
Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander:			
Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander	39	9	6
Neither	351	79	94
Prefer not to say	54	12	-
Have you had a disability for more than 6 months?:			
Yes	55	12	10
No	349	79	90
Prefer not to say	40	9	-

²³ Australian Bureau of Statistics data on schools, 2020 (<https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/education/schools/2020>).

²⁴ In 2020 there were 234 students whose biological sex was reported as neither male nor female. In order to protect the confidentiality of these students the ABS has randomly assigned them to have either a male or female status.

²⁵ Australian Bureau of Statistics, Disability, Ageing and Carers, Australia: Summary of Findings 2018

²⁶ Thomson, S., Wernert, N., Rodrigues, S., & O'Grady, E. (2020). TIMSS 2019 Australia Highlights. Australian Council for Educational Research.

	N	% of sample	% National
How often do you speak English at home?:			
Always	323	73	91
Most of the time	76	17	
Sometimes	30	7	9
Never	8	2	
Prefer not to say	7	2	-
Transition stage*:			
Pre-transition	234	53	
Post-transition	210	47	

*Pre-transition is the final year of primary schooling, usually Year 6 (Year 6 and 7 in SA Government schools at the time of the research). Post-transition is the first year of secondary schooling, usually Year 7 (Year 8 in SA Government schools at the time of the research).

Student forum design

Initial design

Mindful of the target population, an initial step in student forum design was to construct a forum ‘lesson plan’²⁷, by designing age-appropriate and relevant questions and activities that would assist students in speaking about their imminent or ongoing transition experiences. This was undertaken at the same time as the literature review in order to draw from and build upon best practice, as well as to address Life Education Australia’s research goal: to engage with a diverse mix of 10–14 year old students in Australia about the concept of school transitions.

The guiding principle behind forum design was to enable students to provide, to the best of their ability on the day, information about their own transition experiences.

- From the researcher perspective, the forum sessions therefore needed to include a mix of quantitative and qualitative interview prompts, structured according to the research objectives and proposed context.
- From the student perspective, the forum sessions would need to introduce students to the nature and goals of the research, and the concepts of consent and confidentiality; guide students through the interview prompts; and allow for the forums to be differentiated *in situ* according to individual school and student needs.

The forum lesson plan began with a general introduction to the concept of research so that students could understand the purpose of the forums, be able to provide informed consent to participate, and gain an insight into research processes. While this is good practice in terms of assisting the students to feel comfortable and in control of their environment, this also addresses ethical requirements in multiple jurisdictions in terms of researchers’ duty of care towards their volunteer participants. The introductory activities were also designed to introduce the researchers and help build a rapport between them and the participants, so that students would feel more comfortable in sharing their ideas and opinions later in the forum session.

Qualitative research activities were developed that would allow students to centre their thinking on the research topic – school transitions – and included prompts to identify their own feelings and opinions about their transition experiences. Activities also asked students to reflect more deeply on some of their ideas in order to elicit further detail about any transition-related challenges and potential solutions.

Quantitative research activities were also developed, including a brief tick-box survey towards the end of the forum to prompt any further ideas that had not yet been discussed. This survey was designed via a collection of transition-related challenges that had been drawn from the findings in the literature review. The survey component was intentionally used towards the end of the forum session so that, as far as possible, students’ qualitative responses would not be influenced by the quantitative question items.

The final activity contained four questions regarding student background in terms of gender, language spoken at home, and whether or not students had a disability or identified as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander. Participants’ responses to these demographic questions were aimed at a) tracking the

²⁷ Keeping in mind that the forum was not a school ‘lesson’ but primarily a data collection exercise.

desired diversity in student voices and b) enabling the analyses of results by demographic groups with sufficiently large numbers. Students were reminded that they could not be identified from their responses to these demographic questions.

Once the forum design and associated resources had been drafted, the forum plan and resources were refined for stakeholder review and input, and cognitive testing (piloting). Cognitive testing was particularly important – given that student forums are a less common and highly individualised form of data elicitation, the forum structure and content had been newly created and tailored to the needs of the project. This structure and content needed trialling to ensure it was fit for purpose, and to include student voice in the development of the forums.

First piloting of forums

In order to pilot the forum structure and materials, the research team hosted two cognitive testing sessions. Cognitive testing is a particular type of piloting or trialling that is used to observe how survey or interview content will be understood, processed, and responded to by a small sample of respondents (Miller, 2014). Cognitive testing procedures have been developed through combining elements of cognitive psychology and survey methodology (for example, piloting) in order to allow for understanding of questions from the respondent’s perspective rather than that of the researcher (Drennan, 2004). “Probes” – for example, think-aloud exercises, checking comprehension, or reflecting on question items – are used to elicit respondents’ perspectives. This method was particularly suited to the context of the Student Forums project, where intended respondents are adolescents and where response options are potentially very broad.

Cognitive testing of the draft forum structure and content (see Table 7) was first undertaken in early October 2020 with a group of students who met the survey target population demographics. The group included eight students aged nine to 14 years of age; mean age 12.1 years; who were currently attending schools in Australia. The forum was conducted with these eight students in a single group at the ACER office in Adelaide during school holidays. In addition to the cognitive testing of the forum per se, the forum session was timed in order to gauge an approximate delivery time that could be communicated to invited schools.

General comprehension questions were asked throughout the forum – students were actively encouraged to make comments or ask questions during all activities – and the forum session concluded with a general debriefing conversation on what the students thought overall. Students were asked for their own opinions on the forum content and level of understanding required, and also to provide an opinion on how they thought their classroom peers might react to the forum questions and activities.

Table 7: Draft forum schedule and activities

Activity	Predicted Timing
Introduction to the project, facilitators and structure of the forum - What can we do to help with transitions?	5 min
Data activity - Brief interactive survey (e.g. what flavour of ice-cream do you like?) - Demonstration of how student responses are kept confidential and how data collected will help Life Education and their own teachers	10 min

Activity	Predicted Timing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Project-specific survey (e.g. which of these school-transition issues would you like to know more about?) - Brief discussion on results and need to have open-ended responses 	
Drawing activity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Draw a picture of yourself with an emoji face. How does moving to high school make you feel? (you can draw/label more than one emotion) - What are the other things that impact your move, both positive and negative? Draw/label these around the picture of yourself. 	10 min
Group activity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Pair up, share some of the positive aspects around the move to high school, school-specific or otherwise (use previous activity drawing if needed) - Share with the larger group - Pair up, share some of your concerns around the move to high school, school-specific or otherwise (use previous activity drawing if needed) - Share with the larger group - Add to own drawing as desired 	15 min
Group activity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Start in pairs: If you could ask your secondary school to help you with anything in particular, what would it be? ("I wonder" prompts) - 	10 min
Individual activity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Was there anything you would like to raise? Opportunity to give anonymous suggestions. 	5 min
Summary activity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Collection or upload of drawings - Referral to assistance - Farewells 	5 min

The following observations were made during the cognitive testing session.

Data activities: The data activity was designed to provide students with a brief introduction to the research project, and to show how the data they contribute would be anonymised and analysed to create new information. This was to be coordinated via an electronic application – Kahoot! – designed to facilitate very brief surveys in a classroom setting. Despite the application being set up and tested multiple times in advance of the cognitive testing session, researchers were unable to connect with the app-based surveys on the day. The data activity was therefore run as a pen-and-paper activity to demonstrate the aims and intended processes of the research.

Drawing, group and individual activities: The drawing, group and individual activities were designed to help students see themselves at the centre of the research topic of school transitions (emoji and drawing activity), add to or elaborate on their ideas through a 'think-pair-share' exercise (first group activity), and brainstorm possible solutions to any challenges (second group activity). The individual activity provided the opportunity for students to comment on anything further or to write down anything they wanted to contribute but did not want to say out loud in the forum. These activities proceeded as planned, facilitated by their nature as pen- and paper-based activities.

At the end of the forum session, students were shown an exemplar worksheet with the activities completed, namely, an emoji with labelled diagrams that represent student opinions around school transition. They were asked whether this would have helped them in responding to the task, or whether they thought it was leading them to a “correct answer”. All students agreed that it would have been helpful to have the exemplar. A discussion ensued regarding the leading nature of examples, particularly when a student’s answer might actually be the same as the example – would a student then write their answer or would they fear that they might be seen as “copying”? The students suggested that if the exemplar answers were all clearly fictional – like the magic-school example – then we could be confident that students would not replicate or be overly led by the example.

The sharing activities completed as a whole group involved students writing some of their ideas on sticky notes and posting these to a whiteboard. While the activity itself was easily managed by the students, they noted afterwards that they were less than comfortable with everyone knowing what some of their ideas had been, even when their ideas were non-personal and self-selected.

Comprehension: Students were positive overall about the forum content, stating that the language and ideas used were easy to understand.

Response time: The cognitive testing session took one hour and each activity section in the forum plan was individually timed. Predicted response times were accurate as a maximum timeslot. Some students, however, finished tasks very quickly and were satisfied with one-word or one-comment responses. While some students very much enjoyed the opportunity to depict their responses through drawings, and to take their time in these endeavours, some students preferred to provide spoken or limited written feedback.

Comparison to usual classroom activities: Students felt the activities were different as they were being asked for their opinions – and this was not seen as “boring” or “bad”. The three main points of feedback with regard to session content were: the students thought having to draw emotions was unusual; it was seen as a first-day-at-school type activity; and, they noted that some students do not like drawing and would prefer written or spoken tasks.

Some students felt the session was too long and needed a break or time to stand up or move. Students felt that some of their classmates might respond negatively to the session as it might be seen as irrelevant or low priority. This could lead to untrue or joke responses.

Given that some students finished tasks more quickly than others the students suggested that noise control could become an issue whilst students were still working. Finally, the students suggested that any behaviour issues could be mitigated by separating students, however, they felt that classroom management should not “split up friends”.

Modifications after first piloting

After reflecting on the first piloting of forums, the following modifications were made.

It was decided to proceed with a pen-and-paper version for introducing the research project and for introducing students to the concepts related to data collection and protection. This would also remove the need to provide computer hardware in some sample schools, and would negate significant project risk in ensuring access to computer hardware, software, and internet connectivity across all sampled schools. The content in the first data activity would remain the same; the second data activity (survey)

was repurposed and shifted to the end of the forum to prompt any ideas that had not yet been covered through the qualitative questioning.

Given that there was no longer a need for students to use electronic means of response, it was decided to completely modify the paper resources given to students. Existing worksheets and sticky-note activities were converted into a booklet that would be distributed to each student in a forum. Based on feedback from the cognitive testing – that some students liked or were able to write and draw more than others, and that some students preferred to talk rather than write – students in the forums would be advised that they could use the booklet for their written or drawn responses, provide spoken responses, or a combination of both as they felt was most appropriate for them. This modification was key to ensuring that the forums could be immediately differentiated for students and accommodate most student needs in the mainstream schools visited.

As the booklet-and-conversation method is much more individualised, particularly the concept of eliciting only spoken responses from some students, it was decided that forums would have a maximum of eight students at a time to facilitate both conversation and idea sharing. This number also aligned better with the research guidance on focus group size (Krueger & Casey, 2001; Gibbs, 2012).

In addition, students would not be required to share their ideas with their group at all if they felt uncomfortable. This was in response to feedback from the sticky-note activity: student responses would be contained within their workbook. These options of writing-only, speaking-only, or a combination of writing and speaking according to an individual student's preference, was a core differentiation strategy.

The presentation that was designed to accompany each forum was revised to include an exemplar of a completed worksheet that showed multiple and clearly fictional examples of what responses might look like. This would ensure that students had extra scaffolding regarding what to do, without necessarily being led towards particular responses.

Second piloting of forums

The revised forum structure and resources were re-tested in January 2021 with a smaller set of different students²⁸, in order to provide a final check before live forums began in March 2021. Some activities in this second cognitive testing session were photo-recorded in order to support a training resource for the ACER research team members who would deliver the forums in schools.

The students attended the forum at the ACER office in Adelaide during their school holidays and participated in the forum as one group. General comprehension questions were asked throughout the forum – students were actively encouraged to make comments or ask questions during all activities – and the forum session again concluded with a general debriefing conversation on what the students thought overall. Students were asked for their own opinions, and also to provide an opinion on how they thought their classroom peers might react to the forum questions and activities.

Data activities: The introduction-to-data-collection activity ran as per the revised pen-and-paper version, with no issues reported. Students indicated that the activity helped their understanding of how forum data would be kept confidential. The survey activity at the end of the forum was also well-

²⁸ This follow-up set included two students aged 10 and 12 years of age; currently attending school in Australia and in Year 6 and Year 7 respectively.

understood when introduced as existing knowledge with a lead-in of, “we’d like to know if these things are true for you too”.

Drawing, group and individual activities: The drawing, group and individual activities were designed to help students centre themselves in the research topic of school transitions (emoji and drawing activity), add to or elaborate on their ideas through a sharing exercise (through giving an example from their ideas, if they chose to), and to brainstorm possible solutions to any challenges. These activities proceeded as planned, with no issues reported.

Students commented positively on the choice to share their ideas aloud or not, particularly reflecting on the fact that some students do not want to speak in front of groups, even when with friends. They also commented on the usefulness of the fictional exemplar response.

Comprehension: Students were positive overall about the forum content, stating that the language and ideas used were easy to understand.

Response time: Predicted response times, as per the updated forum plan (see Table 8 – this was adopted as the final schedule) were accurate and students felt they had enough time to respond to the forum tasks. Again, there was a difference in time taken when a student chose to draw in detail compared to when they chose to provide a spoken or written response, however, this was seen as acceptable for differentiation purposes.

Table 8: Final forum schedule and activities

Activity	Timing (max)	Purpose
Set up classroom/interview space All activities listed below are delivered in paper format. ACER will have the IT hardware to support the PowerPoint and the survey display.	Before forums	Forum preparation
Introduction - The project, facilitators and forum structure - What is school transition like for students?	2 min	Contextual grounding
Data confidentiality - Brief paper-based survey (What flavour of ice-cream do you like?) - Demonstration of how student responses are kept confidential and how data collected will help Life Education Australia	5 min	Providing insight into data collection, reassurance of confidentiality
Activity 1 - Introduction to booklet - Activity 1, thinking about “what happens here”	5 min	Providing insight into student experience of school-specific transition practices
Activity 2 - Choose 1–3 emoji that represent how you feel about your school transition. What makes you feel that way? Explain your emoji(s). - What other things impact school transition? What else is going on in your world? Draw/label these around the emoji of yourself. (Exemplar available)	5 min	Mindset switch to own transition, surface-level brainstorm of opportunities and concerns

Activity	Timing (max)	Purpose
Sharing activity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Share your thoughts with the group - What are the positives? - What are the negatives? - Add to your own ideas (booklet) if you wish 	5 min	Develop ideas around opportunities and concerns, gain deeper understanding and input from peers
Activity 3 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Pick one or two of your ideas - What worries or challenges you the most? - What could help more with this? - How could this be solved? - How (or from whom) would you prefer to learn more? Students can choose to record in booklet or share aloud with group.	5 min	Translation of ideas to practical help
Activity 4 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Project-specific survey (e.g. which of these school-transition issues would you like to know more about?) - Is there anything else about transitions or related challenges you'd like to mention? - Demographic data survey 	3 min	Further opportunity to share, if needed
Conclusion <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Collection of booklets - School-specific assistance referrals (flyer) given to students - Farewells, students return to own classroom 	As needed	Data consolidation, assurance of student wellbeing

This second cognitive testing session took 45 minutes, including stoppages for cognitive feedback. Students indicated that this was a little too long, but agreed that 30 minutes without stoppages would likely be acceptable for “others in their class”.

Modifications after second piloting

As had already occurred after the first piloting of forums, student responses from the second piloting were analysed to ensure the data ultimately collected would address the research objectives, namely, that the forums were directly capturing student voice and experience related to school transition, including:

- Contemporary issues faced by students in middle school
- Potential knowledge gaps related to school transition
- Preferred methods of student learning and engagement.

Responses from both piloting sessions indicated that student voice and experiences were being captured, relevant to the research objectives.

As there were minimal changes resulting from the second cognitive test – those limited to minor word-smithing of the student booklet and PowerPoint support slides – the forum structure and content was deemed acceptable to be used in the live forums. Pre-transition (primary) and post-transition (secondary) versions of the student booklets and PowerPoint support slides, as used in the student forums, are provided as Appendices 3–6.

Ethics

Prior to forum implementation in schools, ethics applications were submitted to the ten relevant authorities to gain permission to approach school principals in the first instance. Initial approval for the project was received from the ACER Ethics Committee, followed by ethics approval from the four state government departments of education and five Catholic dioceses that had sampled schools within their jurisdictions (see Table 9).

Table 9. Ethics jurisdictions

Authority	Reference	Approval date
Australian Council for Educational Research (in-house ethics committee)	447	1-Sep-20
New South Wales Department for Education	SERAP 2020413	15-Dec-20
Queensland Government Department of Education	550/27/2396	05-Mar-21
South Australian Department for Education	2020-0061	11-Nov-20
Western Australia Department for Education	D21/0172956	19-Apr-21
Brisbane Catholic Education (Archdiocese of Brisbane)	451	30-Nov-20
Catholic Education, Diocese of Bathurst	Project title	10-Dec-20
Catholic Education South Australia (Archdiocese of Adelaide)	202023	11-Nov-20
Catholic Education Western Australia (Archdiocese of Perth)	RP2020/41	15-Dec-20
Catholic Schools Office, Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle	Project title	17-Nov-20

Permission to conduct research in Australian independent schools is at the discretion of the school principal and does not need to go through a separate authority in addition to ACER's ethics committee.

Once ethics approval was received from each jurisdiction, sampled schools in that particular jurisdiction were invited to participate in the Student Forums project.

Student forum implementation

A total of 82 student forums were held by the end of the data collection phase of the project (end of May 2021).

The forums were conducted in English and used plain, age-appropriate language suitable for students in the year levels interviewed. Average size for classes in Australian schools are approximately 25 students; of course, this varied for each individual school. ACER requested that students from the nominated classes would attend the 30-minute forums in groups of 4–8 students at a time.

Two researchers from ACER led the forums; some forums were also observed by staff from LEA or Kantar. Schools were welcome to request additional forums or to include extra classes: any extra forums were organised through discussion with schools in advance of the visit.

During the forums, participating students were encouraged to complete the activities in the forum workbook or to provide spoken responses to question prompts. Spoken responses were manually recorded by the ACER team (video/audio recording was not used in the forums). Workbooks and spoken responses, once collected, were checked to ensure there was no personal or identifying information recorded. Workbooks and recorded responses were then saved as a school set, namely, data was aggregated to the school level.

Feedback after the forum sessions was provided to each school, to the principal or their delegate(s). This included an overview of the data outcomes of the sessions, and provided an opportunity for the research team to follow up on any particular challenges or concerns identified during the forums. As data had already been anonymised, these conversations were aggregated to the class level of the classes involved.

Data capture and coding

Student responses collected through the forum booklets and written records were transcribed by the research team and stored on the ACER secure server. Transcription was completed by members of the visiting research team to enhance accuracy of transcription and so that the team could simultaneously review and reflect upon the forum content.

Once student responses had been transcribed, they were ready for open coding (Richards, 2005; Silverman, 2006). Open coding is a process where qualitative data are organised according to different themes so that researchers can see patterns and relationships within the data more easily. For each student forum activity, student responses were assigned to either a recurring theme or labelled individually. Overlapping themes could then be merged later in the coding process or more accurately separated, as necessary.

The student forums were intended to be open and honest discussions where students could present their ideas and opinions in spoken or written form through text or drawings. It must be acknowledged, however, that there may have been some occasions where student statements might not have accurately represented what they intended. Nevertheless, all student comments were transcribed and coded as representative of the student's voice at that point in time.

Data analysis

Once captured and coded, student booklet and recorded responses were aggregated as one analysis file. This file was matched to the list of achieved sample schools containing school demographic characteristics.

Analyses undertaken for this report involved frequency analyses of responses in absolute number and percentages. Frequencies are reported as percentages of the total number of respondents, that is, the number of student booklets plus the number of recorded responses. Where responders could give more than one response to an activity, or where one response could be coded to more than one theme, these percentages will total more than 100 due to multiple choices per responder.

It is important to note the difference between "student booklet" responses and "recorded" responses. Student booklets contain the written responses from students, whereas recorded responses are the comments transcribed by an ACER researcher during the live forums and capture all spoken responses.

Some students took advantage of both opportunities, namely, writing their responses *and* speaking them aloud. Most students, however, tended to favour one method over another. There were also students who wrote one response in their booklet and then contributed a different, spoken response. While all efforts have been made to avoid double-capture of student responses, there will be minimal overlap with some responses, hence a small margin of error.

After frequency analyses of responses in absolute number and percentages were complete, data was further analysed by school data and the demographic data captured at the end of the booklet. This analysis by gender, disability status, language background, Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander status, school type, and whether the students were pre-transition or post-transition is described in *Section Three*. The analysis by demographic variables is based on student booklet responses only as these are the responses for which demographic data is known. The analysis used Chi-Squared tests of association (both Pearson and Likelihood Ratio) to test whether differences between groups were significantly different or occurring by chance. Differences are only reported where the statistic is significant at the 0.05 level, indicating that the difference would be found in at least 95 analyses out of 100 if the comparison were to be repeated.

Section Three: Student Voice

As seen in Table 6, student voice was captured from 444 students. These students were spread across the 15 schools that were reflective of the diversity of Australian schools (Table 5). The ideas and opinions of these students are presented in this section, as well as the transition-specific context of their schools.

It should be noted that since students could give more than one response to an activity, and given that one response could be coded to more than one theme (if it contained multiple ideas), totals in this section will vary and often add up to more than 444 or more than 100%.

Finally, where possible, results were tested to explore possible differences by school type, location, and ICSEA value, student demographics such as gender, disability status, language background, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander status, as well as student pre-transition or post-transition status. Comparisons are provided within each activity section. An overview table is provided as Appendix 7.

School-based transition programs

Each of the schools visited were asked about current school-transition practices used in their location. Schools differed in their practices considerably, largely due to their different contexts and perceived student needs in those contexts. Most pre-transition (primary) schools had not actively offered transition activities at the time of the visit – given that the visits were in Terms 1 and 2 – but usually had plans in place to support students towards the end of the school year. Most post-transition (secondary) schools had actively offered transition activities, given that first-year secondary students needed to be inducted into their new environment. Transition activities offered at combined schools tended to reflect the school context – namely, whether secondary intake was large or small – and perceived student needs.

Schools in the sample had a wide range of transition-related activities. Some schools had no transition program with some primary schools relying completely on the secondary schools to manage the process. Some schools had basic or minimal activities while others had new programs in place, or transition programs in the planning stages. A minority of schools had extensive, holistic programs to support students through the transition.

Examples of transition activities reported by the schools included:

- one or more transition days in Year 6 and Year 7 – the latter with or without a peer support/mentor element,
- orientation events for parents or students,
- school tours,
- interviews, and,
- support for special application processes (e.g. entrance exams/applications).

Some schools mentioned that there was a heavy reliance on them from parents to support families through the process. Other schools recognised that students needed to remain ‘present’ in primary school and not be distracted by their upcoming move, while still being academically and socially prepared for high school.

More-extensive programs built upon individual transition activities. Two examples from secondary schools are provided below.

- One large secondary school has a dedicated staff member (transition coordinator) to manage the transition process. The transition coordinator worked with a number of other staff including counsellors, social workers, chaplain and an external wellbeing consultant to support students and their parents. The transition coordinator also liaised with primary schools to ensure students would be best placed for success. This school offered various transition activities for pre-transition students including, open days, exhibition nights, a creative and performing arts program, orientation days/tours day with 'taster' lessons where pre-transition students attended high school classes as part of the day. Transition activities at this school then extended to Year 7 (first year secondary) and included a camp in Term 1, weekly group peer-support lessons with Year 10 students, sporting days and a weekly Year 7 meeting with key support staff. In addition, this school ran transition support classes for Year 7 students who had been identified by their primary school as having diagnosed learning or social-emotional difficulties.
- Another example was a smaller secondary school that spread its formal transition program across 12 months. Pre-transition students (Year 6) began visiting the secondary school in late Term 1 for occasional science or ICT lessons, and orientation walks. Parents were also invited for "walk and talk" sessions as well as enrolment and information sessions. All of these sessions were spread across late Term 1 to the end of Term 4, and included more-intensive transition days late in Term 4. Once the students started at the school in Year 7, transition and induction activities were scheduled as part of a weekly program held over 10 weeks and integrated into the timetable. This program was still seen as an introduction or starting point that would continue to be built upon according to student needs.

In some schools, transition support was integrated into existing wellbeing programs. For example, one combined school offered a program where students in Years 7–12 engaged in academic tutoring and wellbeing support activities, organised by house groups. There was a plan to include Year 5 and 6 students into this program so they could get to know older students in their house groups, so as to ease their transition to high school.

Student perception of transition (Activity 1)

Towards the beginning of the forums, students were asked to consider what sort of transition activities they had experienced. This activity was intended to ensure that students understood the concept of school transition and to build upon what schools had told the research team about their existing transition programs.

At the pre-transition level, discussion was also prompted through whether students knew which secondary school they would attend, which led to conversations around activities related to making that decision and preparing to move to secondary. At the post-transition level, the discussion was initially focused around how students had adjusted to their secondary setting, and what sort of information or experience had assisted them in navigating their new environment.

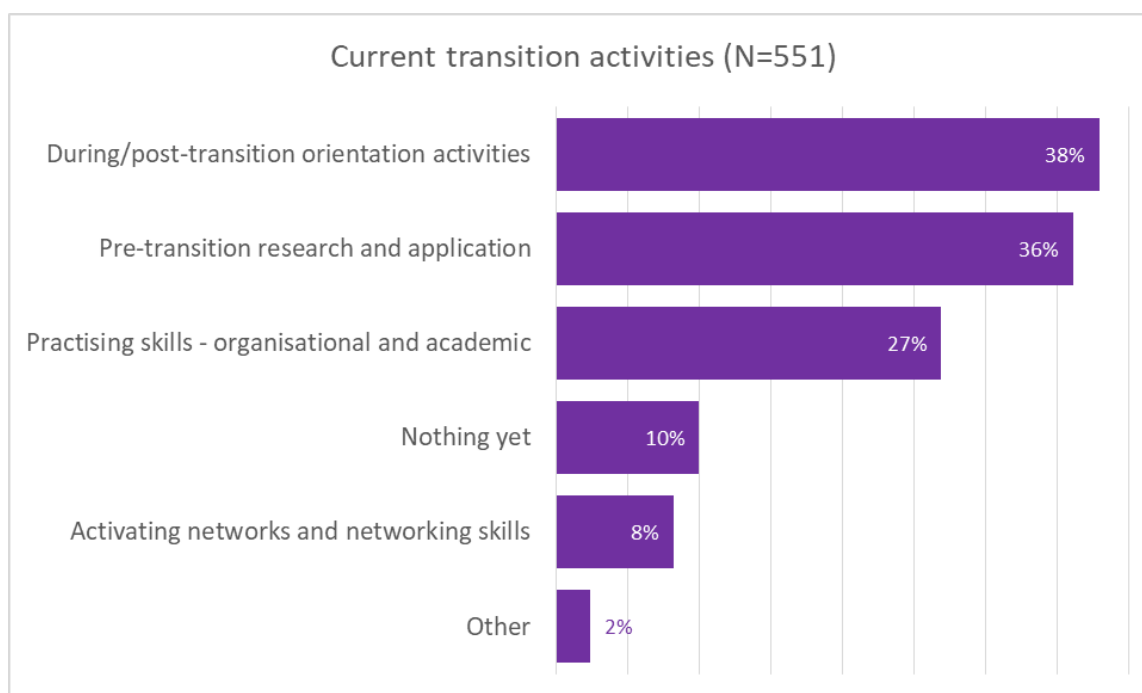


Figure 2: Current or recent transition activities identified by students at the beginning of their forum

The most common activity, comprising 38%²⁹ of responses, was reported by students who had already transitioned to high school, namely, those in secondary schools or the post-transition year in combined schools. These students described the school-based activities they had experienced, including camps and orientation days that centred on information sharing, getting-to-know-the-school activities, technology inductions, and friendship-building exercises. These activities were organised and delivered by the secondary schools. Some students also mentioned individualised support provided to them that was tailored to their specific needs.

The next most common activity reported (36%) was engaging in the research and application processes necessary prior to transition: primary students were much more likely to report this activity though some combined-school and secondary students also commented that they remembered engaging in these efforts. Students in schools with a high ICSEA value or in remote schools were also more likely to report this activity. Activities most commonly noted by students included attending a visit or tour of the secondary school in their pre-transition year, and having discussions with parents or teachers about the transition process. Students also reported intentional conversations with their peers – generally friends or siblings – about attending secondary school. Also within this category, some students described their participation in formal selection and interview processes, and the need to prepare for these interviews or special entrance examinations. This included academic-, community- and sport-related preparations.

Many students noted that they were practising skills for secondary school. 27% of responses fell into this category, and included both academic and organisational activities. Students in schools with a low ICSEA value or those in outer regional schools were more likely to report this activity. Academic preparation included formal tutoring, primary teachers explicitly using activities to prepare students for high school, and students putting extra effort into their work to ensure they were ready for secondary

²⁹ All percentages in this section are reported as “percent of cases”. This is the percentage of respondents (student booklet plus recorded responses). As each respondent could give more than one response, percentages may total more than 100%.

school expectations. Organisational activities included students familiarising themselves with the location and layout of the new school, ensuring they had the skills to manage their own resources (books, technological devices), as well as practising getting up earlier and ensuring that they were able to walk, ride, or catch public transport to the school.

While 10% of responses indicated that students had done “nothing yet”, this was understandable, given that most of these responses came from pre-transition students during Terms 1 and 2. Some of these students were aware that transition activities would be available later in the year.

Eight percent of responses indicated that students were using or had used their social networks to prepare for the move to secondary school, including discussions with friends and family members who were attending their designated high school for the purpose of social information gathering. Some students mentioned that they had intentionally made new friends either pre- or during transition, and had practised some of the affective skills needed for making friends. This response – activating networks and networking skills – was more likely to be contributed from students in metropolitan areas.

The “other” category in Figure 2 captured a variety of student responses that did not align with the major categories that had emerged. Thus, this category included students who indicated that they had moved house in order to get into a particular school zone, students who were undertaking religious classes as a school-entry pre-requisite, and students who had called the Kids Helpline for advice on changing schools. Some students also indicated how their perceptions of secondary school had changed after the transition. For example, “I used to think of high school like a building with massive locker halls. Here, we can choose whether or not we have lockers.”

Analysis by student demographics: Activity 1

Analysis by school data (ICSEA values, location, school type, pre/post transition) is included in the descriptions above, where significant. Further analyses of results by demographic data revealed no significant differences for gender, language background, or Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander status. Students who self-identified as having a disability were more likely to comment that they had participated in orientation activities related to school transition, including ongoing and supplementary activities. An overview of analysis by school and student demographics is provided in Appendix 7.

Students’ feelings about transition (Activity 2a)

Once students had briefly discussed the concept of school transition, they were asked to consider how they felt about their own school transition experience. To begin this activity, they drew and labelled emoji to help them focus on their feelings related to transitions. Most students identified multiple emotions through this activity – given that they might have felt happy about some elements and sad about others, for example – and a wide range of emotions was identified overall. These emotions were collated into overarching categories as shown in Figure 3.

The categories used in Figure 3 are primarily based on the basic psychological categories for human emotion – joy, fear, sadness, anger/disgust, surprise (Jack et al., 2014; Plutchik, 2009). Remaining student responses were thematically organised under further psychological sub-categories – uncertainty, contentment, shyness, interest (sometimes termed “anticipation”), and being overwhelmed (Plutchik, 2009).

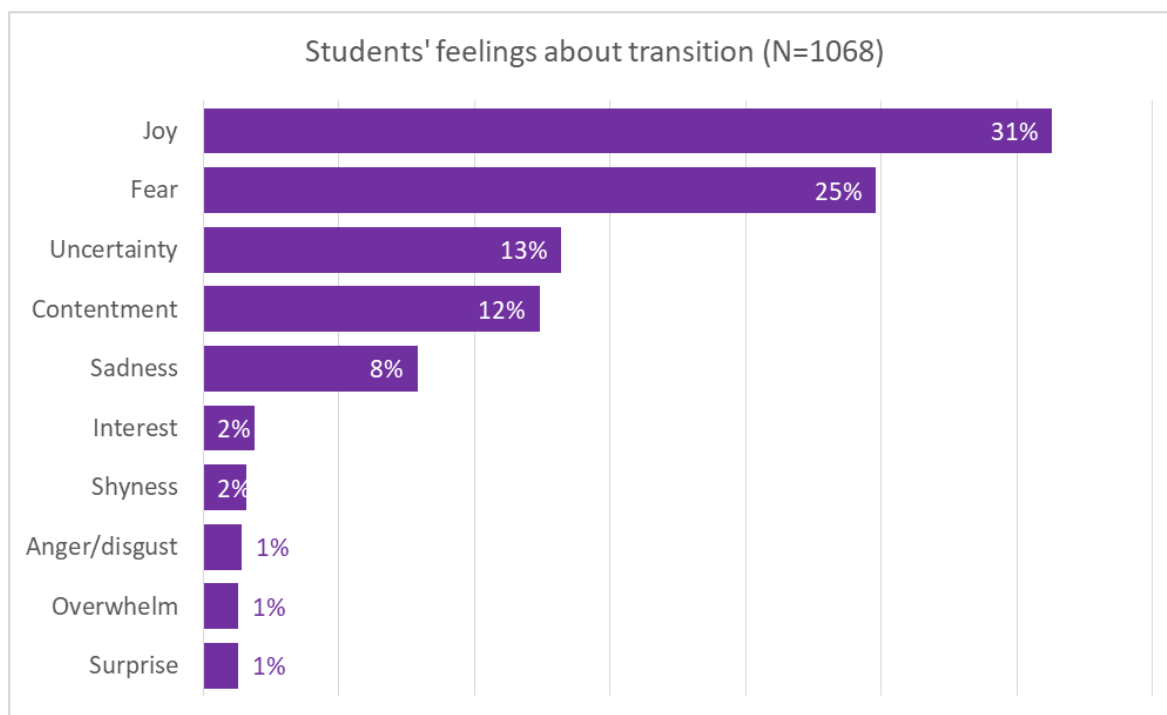


Figure 3: Students' feelings about transition

The results in Figure 3 illustrate that many students were positive about school transition. The “joy” category included the emotions of “good”, “happy”, “excited”, and “confident” and included 31% of responses. An increase in reports of joyful feelings was correlated with an increase in school ICSEA value, and students in inner regional schools were more likely to report feelings of joy around their school transition.

Many students did express some “fear” related to the transition process, which included the emotions of “nervous”, “anxious”, “worried”, “stressed”, “scared”, and “pressured”. Fear was communicated more commonly from students in schools with mid to high ICSEA values, and more likely to come from students in either major cities or remote areas (i.e., not regional), and from students identifying as female. These emotions were often linked to uncertainty or lack of knowledge, as reported further below, and included 25% of responses.

Further to the positivity seen in the “joy” category, many students identified that they were perfectly fine or content with their upcoming or recent transition experience, indicating that they were “cool”, “chilled”, “calm”, “ok”, “normal”, or that the topic of transition was simply not a priority for them. These 12% of responses were collated into the “contentment” category. There were no significant differences in this category when further broken down by school or demographic attributes.

Many students also identified that they were “uncertain” about the transition, which included indications that students were “confused”, “unsure” or “ambivalent”. Uncertainty comprised 13% of responses, and was more likely to be present in primary or secondary schools – that is, students in combined schools had lower levels of uncertainty. Details of students’ uncertainty was further described in their explanations, presented in greater detail below.

Eight percent of responses indicated “sadness”. Most of these responses related to the predicted or recent experience of leaving primary-school friends and missing the primary school environment. A

report of sadness was much more likely to come from students identifying as female or those in inner regional locations.

The remaining categories – shyness, interest, anger/disgust, overwhelm, and surprise – captured relatively smaller proportions of student responses.

Analysis by student demographics: Activity 2a

Analysis by school data (ICSEA values, location, school type, pre/post transition) is included in the descriptions above, where significant. Students identifying as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander were more likely to indicate that they felt uncertain, and less likely to feel joy or contentment about the transition. Students identifying with a disability were more likely to feel uncertainty but less likely to feel fearful about the transition. No significant differences were found in relation to students' language backgrounds. An overview of analysis by school and student demographics is provided in Appendix 7.

Explanations of feelings (Activity 2b)

When students were comfortable that they had represented their feelings through their emoji and label(s), they were asked to consider what contributed to those feelings. Even though the discussion was centred on school transition, explanations could come from school-related or non-school related domains.

Most students' reasons did relate directly to either the school or the school-change process. Figure 4 shows the frequency of the different reasons students gave: *academics*, *high school systems*, *non-school related* and *other* include both positive and challenging feelings, which are described further below.

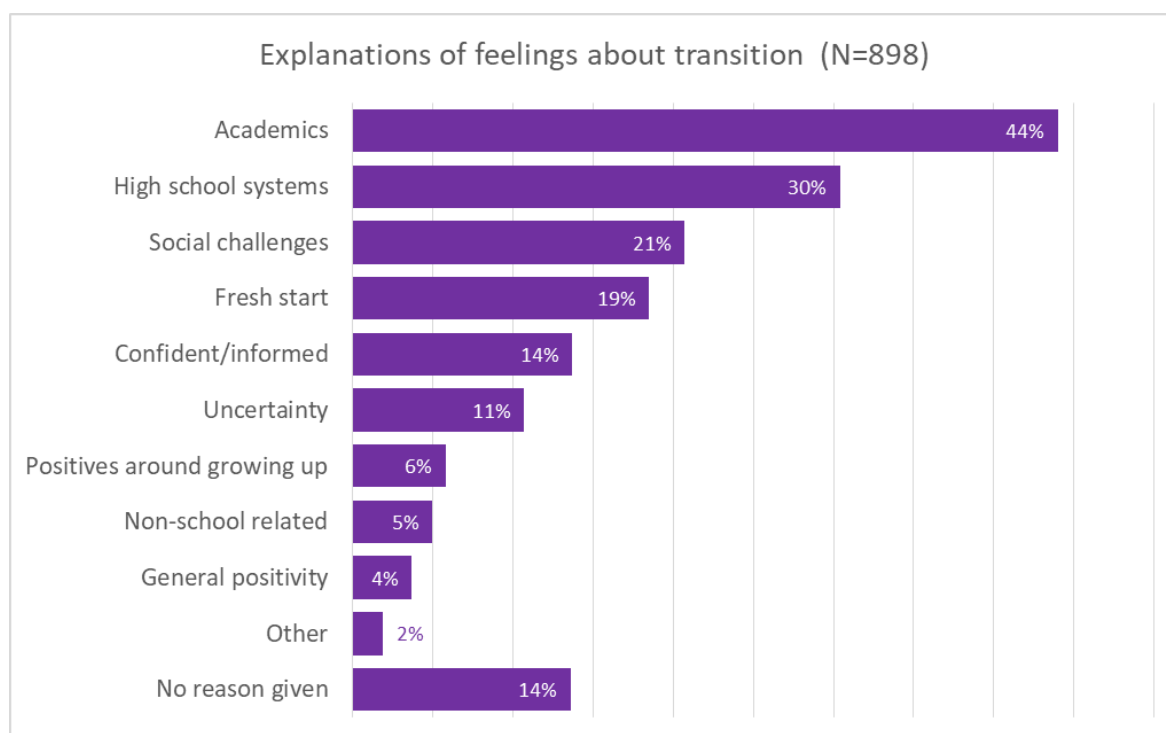


Figure 4: Students' explanations of their feelings about transition

Academic reasons were the most common explanations (44%) for students' emotions. These included the (perceived) increase in academic expectation and workload, and the need to navigate a new academic environment, including opportunities for more subjects and extra-curricular offerings. These explanations were aligned almost equally to both positive and challenging feelings: for example, approximately half of students who talked about the increase in academic expectations were happy or positive about the extra academic expectations (for example, looking forward to more-difficult work) and opportunities. These opportunities included more subjects and extra-curricular choices, better facilities (science laboratories, cooking rooms, bigger sports fields), and the opportunity to have different teachers for different subjects. The other half of students who identified this reason were worried or uncertain whether they could manage the new academic offerings, achievement expectations or workload. Students in schools with a high ICSEA value were significantly more likely to identify academics as a reason for their emotional response.

"Science is better at high school, more complex tasks to do"

"More books in the library"

"Just getting used to all the homework is really hard (especially when you forget to bring your books home)"

"Everyone says that there is lots more homework in high school"

Adjusting to a new (high school) system was the second most common explanation (30%) for students' emotional responses. These responses included getting used to a new or larger school environment, adjusting to uniform requirements, and learning how to follow a timetable and move independently to different classrooms. Students did acknowledge joy and interest in this aspect, as well as confidence that they would manage the change. Students with these feelings were moderately outnumbered, however, by students who felt worried or uncertain about the inherent challenges and uncertainties posed by the new environment and requirements. Interestingly, post-transition students (in both secondary and combined schools) were more likely to identify the adjustment to a new system as a reason for their emotional response.

"I feel excited going to high school because I am looking forward to being in a different learning environment "

"Better than primary school and don't have the same teacher every lesson"

"Happy to be going to multiple classes"

"I'm still getting used to the environment."

"I don't know where to go and where to put bags"

"It makes me nervous, knowing that I might get lost..."

Social challenges were the next most common reason (21%) for an emotional response and were related to the more challenging emotions such as fear, uncertainty and sadness. Social challenges included that students would miss friends from primary school, acknowledgement that making new friends is difficult, uncertainty around fitting in with peers or the school culture, and worries about what other students at the school would be like, including some trepidation as to whether there might be bullying. Students at combined schools and students in remote areas were significantly less likely to identify social challenges as a reason for their emotional response.

"I don't know if I'm going to fit in but I think I'll be fine"

"Worrying about what people might think of me"

"I might get bullied by people that hate me"

"Shy because have to make new friends"

"I feel nervous because there will be new people"

"Sad cause I'm leaving primary school and I like primary school"

Looking forward to or already enjoying a fresh start was the next most common reason (19%) for students' emotional responses, and was linked to positive emotions. In contrast to the social challenges category, there was a large number of students who were particularly looking forward to making new friends. Students also pointed out that moving to high school was an opportunity to make a positive life change or a fresh start, while some students noted that they were looking forward to moving away from challenges in primary school. Students at combined schools and students in remote areas were significantly less likely to identify that they were looking forward to a fresh start whereas students in schools with a high ICSEA value were significantly more likely to identify this reason.

"Excited to find new friends and friend groups"

"I feel excited because I will have an opportunity to fit in and make new friends"

"A new beginning and challenges"

"I feel excited to go to high school because I have always liked new experiences..."

The next two most common reasons also contrasted with each other. There were students who felt positive emotions because they were confident and informed about the transition process (14%) while others felt more challenging emotions due to the uncertainty (11%) of the change. Students who were confident particularly felt that they would know enough people at the new school and that they had gathered enough information about the move. Confidence was also reflected in students who stated that they were not expecting high school to be too different from primary school. Students who identified uncertainty as a reason for their emotions noted that they were unsure about academic as well as teacher expectations, and that they needed more information to make a judgement but were unsure where to start. Students in major cities and students who were pre-transition (in both primary and combined schools) were much more likely to identify uncertainty, whereas students in inner and outer regional schools were more likely to indicate they felt confident or informed.

"Because I have gone to some open days I will know how things will work "

"I think it will be about the same"

"I feel nervous because I know nothing about high school and I don't have any elder siblings to tell me about high school"

"When I'm sick, I'll miss out on a class and won't know what to do"

The remaining reasons for emotions included positives around growing up (6%) such as gaining more privileges and independence, positives and negatives related to non-school reasons (5%) such as getting to move a level up at their sports club or family illness, and general positivity around the move (4%) such as expecting that high school will be fun.

“I'm looking forward to being independent”

“Having our own laptops”

“I get to see a new sunrise every day”

“The family cat dying”

“I'm happy because I will still have time to ride my horse”

“Easy walk home, no bus”

“Other” reasons (2%) were largely personal. Some students commented on the difficulties related to gendered structures that were commonly used within schools, and how this negatively affected students whose identity did not align with uniform policies and class groupings. Further reasons included difficulties around COVID-19 related changes, the (in)convenience of getting to the high school, and the cost. For example, “It took my mother a lot to get me here. The school costs a lot. Makes me feel bad...”

Analysis by student demographics: Activity 2b

Analysis by school data (ICSEA values, location, school type, pre/post transition) is included in the descriptions above, where significant. Students identifying as female were much more likely to state academics, high school systems, social challenges and the idea of a fresh start as reasons for their emotional responses. There were no significant differences found when the data from Activity 2b was broken down by disability status, language background, or Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander status. An overview of analysis by school and student demographics is provided in Appendix 7.

Identifying the main challenges (Activity 3a)

Once students had identified as many school-transition opportunities and challenges as they thought were relevant, they were asked to condense and refine their thoughts in the next activity. The intent of this activity was to gain insight into which opportunities or challenges the students found most pressing, and whether they felt they had any agency to engage with the opportunity or address the challenge. While students had expressed a significant amount of joy and calmness related to their transition experience (see Figure 3), the nature of Activity 3 tended to draw out the challenges that students experienced, with a view to find ways of easing those challenges. Figure 5 shows the main challenges identified.

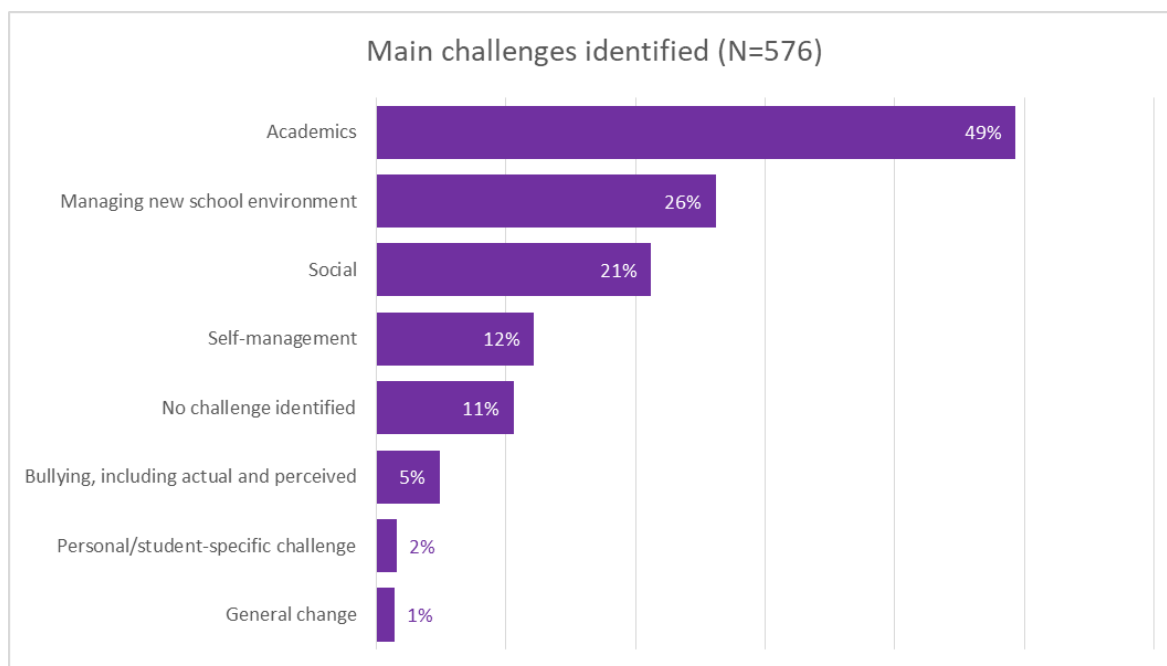


Figure 5: Main challenges related to school transition, as identified by students

The main challenge perceived by students, with 49% of responses, was related to academic schoolwork. This included concerns surrounding the difficulty level and amount of classroom work, homework, and assessment tasks, as well as the increased expectations from parents and teachers. Pre-transition students commented on these challenges from their own perspective, reported hearsay from others, or reported direct experience from seeing a sibling manage the transition. Post-transition students commented on these challenges from their own experience. Students at combined schools and students who were pre-transition were more likely to identify academics as their main challenge; students at schools in major cities were less likely to identify this challenge.

The next most common challenge, indicated by 26% of responses, was related to managing the new school environment. This included challenges such as students finding their way around a larger or more complex school, and getting used to the new cultural and practical expectations of being in a secondary school environment. Many students commented on the concept of a different school culture, both at the macro-level in terms of school expectations, and at the micro-level in terms of individual interactions. For example, students talked about, “how things are done here”, or “getting new rules and expectations for each class”. They also talked about how, “when I move classes I don’t want to go to the wrong one”, “[I] didn’t know where to put bags”, or “making sure I had my books”. Students in schools with low ICSEA values and in schools in major cities were more likely to report this as their main challenge.

Social challenges gained 21% of responses, which included the challenges related to both making new friends and dealing with the potential loss of old friends, as well as the difficulties in maintaining ongoing friendships. Student comments included:

“I think the biggest challenge is meeting new people”

“The most worrying thing for me would be having to leave some really good friends behind”

“Finding the right people to hang out with”

Students at combined schools were less likely to identify social challenges as their main concern. Students at schools in major cities were more likely to identify this challenge.

Self-management (12% of responses) included challenges such as getting up on time, catching public transport, and changing uniforms during the day (e.g., for physical education). Students also mentioned the need to increase their self-discipline to cope with the increased responsibilities and challenges that come with being a secondary student. Student comments included:

“We really need to learn how to manage our time. That’s important also for when you’re older”

“Coming to class early prepared”

“In primary school I had heaps of time. I used to play hockey every weekend. Now I don’t”

Students in schools with high ICSEA values were more likely to report self-management as their main challenge.

Students commented on their fear that bullying might occur at secondary school (5% of responses). None of the students in the forums reported that they had been directly bullied, but comments indicated that a friend had the experience, or that they had heard direct reports of bullying from others.

Some students identified their own individual challenges (2%), for example, challenges related to a specific learning difficulty and how that might affect their experience at high school. Students also commented on challenges related to the uncertainty of change in general or stepping outside of one’s comfort zone (1%).

Not shown in the chart are five categories with less than one percent of cases each. These included that secondary school was a more “boring” place than primary school as there were less obvious diversions or coping mechanisms available (for example, playgrounds or fidget toys), and comments on the challenges inherent in entrance examinations. There were also comments on injustices experienced and ongoing in the school system, for example, some students felt forced to act, learn, and present themselves in a certain way to stay within rigid boundaries.

Analysis by student demographics: Activity 3a

Analysis by school data (ICSEA values, location, school type, pre/post transition) is included in the descriptions above, where significant. Students who identified as having a disability were less likely to comment that academic matters were their main challenge but were more likely to identify their own specific challenges – often disability related – as their main concern. There were no significant differences when the data from Activity 3a was broken down by gender, language background, or Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander status. An overview of analysis by school and student demographics is provided in Appendix 7.

Potential solutions (Activity 3b)

Leading on from the main challenges, students were asked to think about how these transition-related challenges could be solved (if solvable), or made easier for future students. Suggestions from students were organised into the themes of *school work*, *managing the school environment*, *self-management*, *social* (including bullying), and *other*, to align with the main challenges identified as shown in Figure 6.

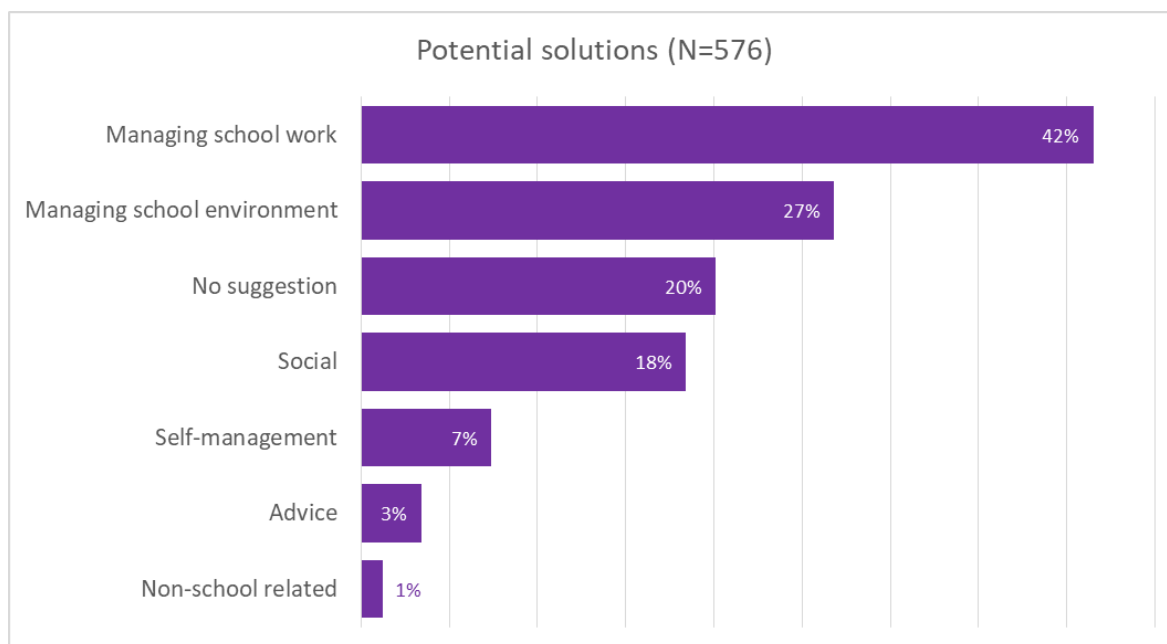


Figure 6: Potential solutions to challenges, identified by students

Managing school work (42%)

It was overwhelmingly clear that students took, or wished to take, responsibility for managing the academic expectations at secondary school, and this was the most common suggestion for alleviating the transition experience. Most comments in this category related to how students could take control of their own learning, followed by suggestions on how teachers or schools could adjust learning expectations or the learning environment.

Student-centred comments included:

“Spacing out my time to fit in homework. Make sure that you do homework before hanging out so that you don't stress about the work”

“Just to take deep breaths in and out when scared”

“Suggest keep on schedule and maintain self-discipline”

School-centred comments included:

“Teachers could have eased us into more work”

“More help with time management - tools like white boards and rosters to help know when things are due”

“More spare time so can cope with extra workload”

“Change the system!”

If these strategies did not work, many students also suggested the option of having a tutor to help with academic demands.

Students in combined schools, students in remote schools, and those who were pre-transition were more likely to suggest solutions related to managing school work.

Managing the school environment (27%)

Ideas for managing the school environment were also sub-categorised into school-centred or student-centred solutions. Student-centred solutions included suggestions to learn the school rules, expectations and culture as soon as possible, to use maps and other orientation information well, and to ask teachers and other students for help when needed. School-centred ideas included further suggestions as to how schools could offer or manage orientation activities to ease the transition, as well as ideas to improve the school environment overall (e.g., making expectations more consistent across year levels and classes, improving facilities).

Student-centred comments included:

“I would tell Year 6 students to behave because you get in to more trouble at high school”

“Always ask for help and to have a map with you”

“The Year 8s have helped me a lot. They told me what to do and explained a lot to me”

School-centred comments included:

“Maybe some high school students could visit primary schools and the year 6 students could ask questions about high school”

“Make rules in all classes similar.” “[For example] being able to sit anywhere because we have a lot of seating plans and it's hard to remember for every class”

“School buddies could help”

Students in secondary schools, students in schools with low ICSEA values, and those in major cities were more likely to suggest solutions related to managing the school environment.

Social challenges (18%)

Students had many suggestions for the social challenges related to transitioning to secondary school, largely related to strategies for making new friends and for avoiding bullying. Some of these comments are illustrated below:

“Me being nice to them so we can slowly grow to be friends”

“Start off with [just] one friend and then move on to more”

“At peer support, if we talked more about what people are like that would make it easier to find people you want to hang out with”

“Just be yourself, don't worry about how others will think or judge you”

Students who were pre-transition (in both primary and combined) schools and students in major cities were more likely to suggest solutions related to social challenges.

Self-management (7%)

Ideas for improved self-management related to both time and resource management. Students commented on the importance of managing time, for example, getting up early to arrive at school on time, and making sure they had scheduled time for homework and extra-curricular activities outside of school. Students also commented on the need to be organised in relation to books, technology and other resource requirements at school. The need to take care of laptops or other devices, and to ensure these were charged and ready to use was a common topic of conversation. Students also noted that the need to take a sports uniform to school and to change uniform back and forth during the day was a particularly different requirement compared to primary school, and one to which it might take time to adapt.

Students in schools with high ICSEA values were more likely to suggest solutions related to self-management.

Advice (3%)

Students also provided general advice for students who would transition in the future, as well as messages for students' own younger selves. These included:

"I could have gone to the counsellor earlier"

"Just be prepared. It's like a hit in the face when you first start. But you get used to it for sure, there's no way you won't be prepared even if [you think] you're not."

"Would tell others don't be scared of big kids and the work, and ask more questions"

"Encourage the Year 7s. Tell them to hang in there, after the first year you'll be fine. Learn the basics like academic as well as how to get around the school - then it gets easier."

Analysis by student demographics: Activity 3b

Analysis by school data (ICSEA values, location, school type, pre/post transition) is included in the descriptions above, where significant. Students who identified as having a disability were less likely to suggest solutions related to managing school work. There were no significant differences when the data from Activity 3b was broken down by gender, language background, or Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander status. An overview of analysis by school and student demographics is provided in Appendix 7.

What do students want to know? (Activity 4)

The final activity asked students to respond with 'Yes', 'No' or 'Don't know' to indicate which of the five different school-transition topics that had emerged from the environmental scan and literature review (see Chapter 2) they would like to know more about. These included school operations (timetables, maps), academics (how difficult is the work?), people – teachers, friends (who will be there?), workload (how much school work or homework will they have?) and time for fun (how to balance sports and extra-curricular activities with school work).

After those five questions in Activity 4, an open ended question asked the students if there was anything else about transitions or related challenges that they wanted to mention. This question gave students one last chance to mention anything that may not have already been covered in the rest of the forum.

The results of the survey part of this activity suggested that more than two thirds of students wanted to know more about all five topics listed (ranging from 66% to 79% of students across topics). Almost 80% of students wanted to know more about how much time for sports and activities they would have after taking school work into account. 76% of students wanted to know more about the difficulty level of academics at high school, while knowing more about who would be in high school was also a common topic of interest with 71% of students saying ‘Yes’ to learning more about this. Two-thirds (66%) of students still wanted to know more about “how my new school operates”. While this was the least popular topic, the lower rate of response reflects student views from combined schools in the sample who were already familiar with the operation of the school. Students from these schools were less likely to respond ‘Yes’ to learning more about school operations.

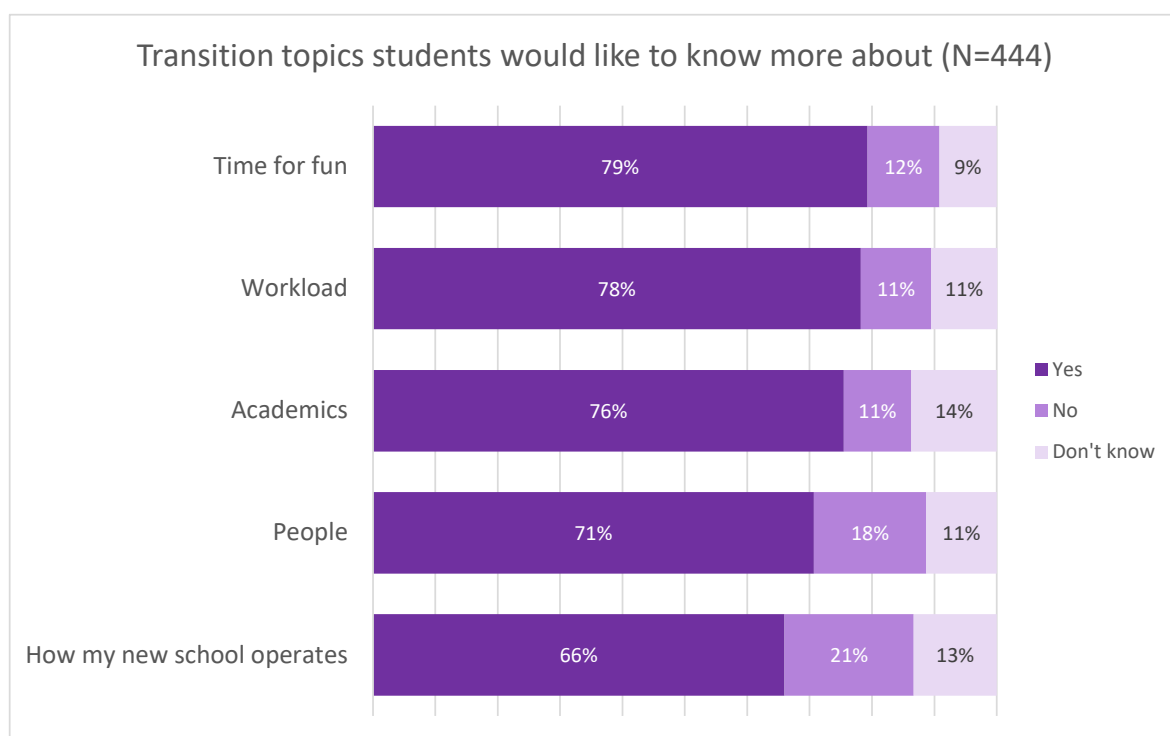


Figure 7: Relative popularity of five transition topics that students would like to know more about

The final question asking if there was anything else students wanted to mention was largely left unanswered by students in the booklet. Although conversations were still generally strong at this stage of the forums, few or no new topics were raised.

There were 76 specific responses recorded in the booklets and on the spoken record. About half of these were either a repeat of the transition topics the students would like to know more about identified in the first part of Activity 4 (for example, “How hard are the tests?”) or a positive comment about the students’ success in high school (for example, “I enjoy it mostly”). The remaining response themes are provided in Table 10.

Table 10: Themes and examples from the final question

Theme	Example quotes from students
Uncertainty	Will we do lots of group work? How electives work and what electives are there? How much are we going to work on the computers? I want to know more but on the other hand, if I know more, it might stress me out
Academic challenges	Getting through each class is really hard I'm getting tutoring to help prepare for Year 7
Positive experiences	Explaining. I like how the teachers/staff explained everything we did.
School cultures	Always if you need help, go to a Year 8 or teacher, don't be scared Having to deal with schools that don't support the LGBTIQA+ community or just do not mention it at all What other students think about teachers so I know how to act around different teachers
Logistical challenges	What some of the rooms are for Try not to forget anything on the first day
Social challenges	Like to meet some kids to know well before going to school; It's kinda scary because you have never met anyone here before and new teachers
Challenges outside school	Friends and family having mental health challenges

Analysis by school and student variables: Activity 4

Pre-transition students were much more likely to indicate that they wished to know how their new school operated. No other significant differences emerged when this data was broken down by all other school or demographic categories. An overview of analysis by school and student demographics is provided in Appendix 7.

Learning preferences

In addition to the opportunities offered and challenges faced during transition, and the suggestions for easing the transition, students were also asked about their learning preferences. This question aimed to provide a picture as to how students like to access new information and learning experiences, and would assist in the future design of any resources aimed at students. The students identified three main preferences of ways to learn (27% of responses each): action-based learning (for example, demonstrations or excursions), use of technology; and, self-directed learning. Students' also identified learning from others, either peers or adults, as a popular preference.

Students who indicated they had a disability were more likely to say that they preferred to use technology, videos and computers when learning something new. There were no other significant differences when this data was broken down by all other school or demographic categories.

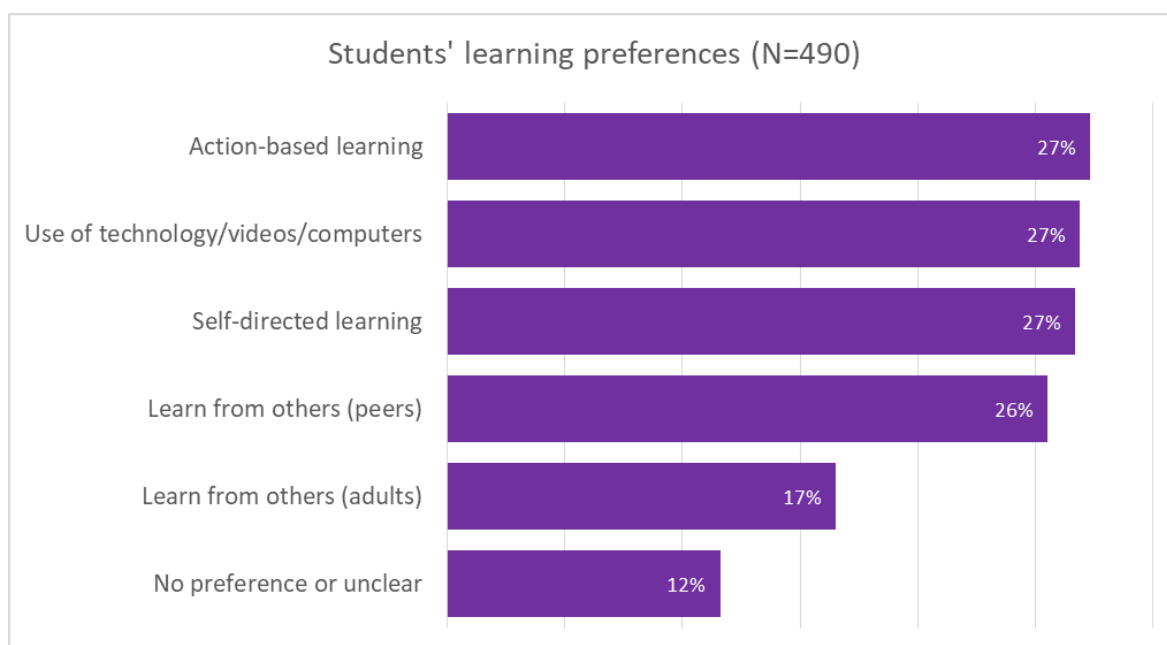


Figure 8: Main categories of students' learning preferences

Section Four: Conclusions and Recommendations

The final point in Stage One of the Being Healthy Being Active project is to propose recommendations for Teacher Resource development. Resources that can be adapted to support parents, caregivers, and friends are worth considering, as these are the people who also provide an immediate support network to students. The recommendations are based on the findings of the literature review, environmental scan, and the analysis of student voice data collected during the student forums. Each of these elements have been presented in detail in Sections 1 and 3 of this report.

The literature review and environmental scan concluded that there are gaps and overlaps in existing knowledge and programs related to school transition. In addition, these two pieces of work found that existing knowledge and understanding is not always immediately transferable to a particular classroom context, resources are not always developed from a positive perspective – as contrasting with a ‘deficit’ perspective – and student voice is generally not evident in resource development.

These findings suggest that any resources developed by Life Education Australia need to address these existing gaps and challenges. While knowledge about the school transition experience is available, this knowledge needs to be **made transferable to a classroom context, through resources that are developed from a growth perspective, and that explicitly reflect the student voice**, particularly the voice collected via the student forums in this project.

The student forums helped to create a picture of student experience during the transition years. Conversations with students indicated that pre-transition students were already engaged in a variety of activities – particularly research, applications to schools, and practising skills for high school – and were developing a transition mindset, even in the first term of their pre-transition year though most of these activities were outside school. Post-transition students identified a range of activities in which they had recently engaged to assist in their transition and commented in detail about the change they had experienced.

Students’ feelings related to the transition process were mixed. While many students were happy or contented about their transition or looked forward to it, many students also commented on particular worries or uncertainties around the move to high school. Frequently, individual students expressed mixed emotions related to different aspects of their transition. **The most common aspects of transition that prompted emotional responses – both positive and challenging – were academic expectations (level and workload), high school operational systems, and the social domain.**

Students had many suggestions, however, for overcoming either potential challenges or the challenges they had actually experienced. While many suggestions were at the school level in terms of how schools or teachers could adjust systems to improve the transition experience, **students particularly emphasised their wish to solve problems themselves and be their own agents of change and improvement.**

Overall findings from the forums provided insights into both content and learning preferences that students in the school transition years would find useful. Students indicated that they wanted to know about academics and workload, high school operations, people at the school, and how to achieve a school–life balance. This content acknowledged and addressed the challenges that students had identified as their main concerns. Student suggestions regarding their preferred ways of learning included action-based, peer-collaborative and self-directed learning, as well as the use of video,

computers, and technology to assist learning. These learning preferences indicated how students would like to access new content and develop new skills.

Long-term aims

Two overarching aims emerged from the conversations held with both students and schools during the Student Forums project, and help to guide the recommendations further below. These aims are directed towards a broader encouragement of student wellbeing within schools and are applicable to other educational purposes as well as those that are transition specific.

The first aim is that schools will engender **a sense of community and belonging**. This includes the school level where there is a connection between teachers and coherence between subjects. It also includes the student level where interpersonal skills and friendships with peers are developed. Many schools noted that a key aim of their transition program was to help students develop increased social awareness and a sense of belonging to their new school. Therefore any successful transition program would help build towards this sense of community and belonging.

The second aim is that students will develop a **'wellbeing buffer'** around themselves that includes skills to manage life changes. A wellbeing buffer, of course, would not only be useful during the school transition phase, but could be expanded and developed to help students navigate other life changes. This affective buffer would include capacities such as adaptability, resilience and skills to manage uncertainty and change in a healthy manner. This aspect could be integrated into existing programs or initiatives – both LEA and non-LEA – building upon capacities and skills that are already developed across the primary and secondary school years.

Recommendations

Specific recommendations that have emerged from the student forums, and that could inform Life Education Australia's transitioning from primary to secondary school resource development, include the following.

1. **Resources are tailored towards different time points in the pre- and post-transition school years.**

Schools vary in their implementation of transition programs, based on location, size, school type, and year levels. For example, it is common for pre-transition students to have no transition activities until late in their pre-transition year, while post-transition students tend to have an intense delivery of transition activities at the very beginning of secondary school. Combined schools indicate transition-management needs that are different from stand-alone primary and secondary schools.

Despite these variations, pre-transition students identify a need for earlier intervention since they are often managing applications for secondary school very early in their pre-transition year, and had uncertainties they wished to resolve. Aiming for earlier intervention could also support the aim of creating a sense of belonging to the high school, as students could be welcomed into the community at an earlier stage. Post-transition students identified a need for extended induction – while activities in the first few weeks were useful for orientation, students suggested that ongoing support would also be useful.

2. Resources assist students in managing the “unknown” elements in life.

Two of the most common emotional responses associated with school transition are fear and uncertainty, and many of the reasons for fear are due to uncertainty. For example, uncertainties related to secondary school orientation, operational conventions, and academic expectations are stated as reasons.

School transition is just one example of change and its resulting uncertainty in a student’s life. This life event could be leveraged as an opportunity for learning about and managing change in general, with school transition as a focusing example. Helping students manage the change around school transition is an opportunity to develop skills for situations where students sense uncertainty, particularly when this uncertainty is due to an absence of information.

3. Resources build upon students’ emerging sense of responsibility and agency.

The most common solutions to transition challenges were student centred. That is, students had a clear sense of their own responsibility and agency and were keen to use this to address their own or others’ challenges. Building upon Recommendation 2, resources could also encourage student agency, self-reliance, and the ability to transfer their learning about school transition to other situations of change.

Building upon students’ own agency has clear potential to support students’ development of their own ‘wellbeing buffer’. There are many occasions in life where students will be faced with a lack of specific information or skills to manage change, hence the need for development of skills to recognise this difficulty and start on a path to knowledge and capability.

4. Resources are centred on existing topics of importance during transition.

The major transition-related topics identified in the literature review – school operations, academics, workload, social elements, and school-life balance – are largely confirmed as being of interest by the students. These topics could be used as a content focus for resource development, complementing existing resources in the Life Education suite, and drawing upon resources identified in the environmental scan.

5. Resource development leverages the learning preferences identified by students.

Students indicated the use of technology and having the opportunity to be self-directed, action-based and peer-collaborative³⁰ in their learning as preferences when needing to learn something new. Any resources developed will benefit from having differentiated options that reflect these preferences to increase student engagement with the resources.

The transition from primary to secondary school is a clear point of change in a student’s life. While the extent of the change will vary between students – some students will move to a significantly different school context while others will remain within the same school – the ability to cope with and manage the change will be largely dependent on a student’s own capacity and surrounding support networks.

³⁰ Peers included friends, siblings, and other students from their own and other year levels.

In this context, the opportunity for Life Education Australia is to assist students – through a teacher resource – in developing a “change toolkit” that they can use to increase their own capacity to manage change and further develop their own wellbeing buffer. This toolkit could use the recommendations above to provide resources to schools for this very purpose.

Resources would use not only the content of school transition as a base but would leverage this learning to provide students with transferable skills to manage other forms of change or uncertainty that will occur in their lives. Resources would also focus on encouraging student agency and self-reliance, as well as using engaging ways of learning, as identified by the students themselves.

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Appendix 1: Literature searches

Search parameters for research literature databases

A+ Education

Search statement

2010-2020

(Cognitive OR social OR emotion* OR behaviour* OR achievement OR literacy OR numeracy OR grades OR outcome* OR performance OR success OR persistence OR attainment OR academic OR “best practice”)

AND

(((SUBJECT:"Middle years") OR (SUBJECT:"Middle schools") OR (SUBJECT:"middle school") OR (SUBJECT:"Primary secondary education")) OR ((SUBJECT:"Secondary education") OR (SUBJECT:"Secondary schools") OR (SUBJECT:"Secondary school") OR (SUBJECT:"Lower secondary years") OR (SUBJECT:"High schools")) OR ((SUBJECT:"Primary education") OR (SUBJECT:"Upper primary years") OR (SUBJECT:"Primary Schools") OR (SUBJECT:"Primary School") OR (SUBJECT:"Primary secondary schools"))))

AND

((SUBJECT:"Primary secondary transition") OR (SUBJECT:"Transition programs") OR SUBJECT:Transitions))

ERIC Database

Search statement

2010-2020

SU (“Transitional programs”)

AND

SU (“Cognitive Development” OR “Social Development” OR “Emotional Development” OR Behavior OR “Academic Achievement” OR Literacy OR Numeracy OR Grades OR Outcome OR Performance OR Success OR Persistence OR “Educational attainment” OR “Best practices”)

And

ED LEVEL (Elementary OR Secondary OR Primary OR “High Schools” OR Grade 5 OR Grade 6 OR Grade 7 OR Grade 8 OR intermediate grades OR “middle schools”)

NOT

ED LEVEL ("higher education" OR "postsecondary education" OR "preschool education" OR "adult education" OR "basic education" OR "early childhood education" OR kindergarten)

MEDLINE

Search conducted: 16 July 2020

Search statement:

Limiters - Date of Publication: 20100101-20201231

Narrow by SubjectAge: - child: 6-12 years

Narrow by SubjectAge: - adolescent: 13-18 years

Search modes - Boolean/Phrase

(MM "Schools")

AND

Cognitive OR social OR psychosocial OR emotion* OR behaviour* OR behaviour* OR academic OR achievement OR literacy OR numeracy OR grades OR outcome* OR performance OR success OR persistence OR attainment OR "best practice" "Evidence Based Practice"

AND

Transition*

AND

"elementary education" OR "elementary school" OR "elementary schools" OR "primary education" OR "primary school" OR "primary schools" OR "middle school" OR "middle schools" OR "middle grades" OR "intermediate grades" OR "middle high" OR "high school" OR "high schools" OR "grade 4" OR "fourth grade" OR "grade 5" OR "fifth grade" OR "grade 6" OR "sixth grade" OR "grade 7" OR "seventh grade" OR "grade 8" OR "eighth grade" OR "grade 9" OR "ninth grade"

PSYCINFO

Search conducted: 16 July 2020

Note: SU = Subject Terms

Search statement:

Limiters - Publication Year: 2010-2020

Narrow by SubjectAge: - school age (6-12 yrs)-AGE LEVEL COMPULSORY FIELD

Narrow by SubjectAge: - adolescence (13-17 yrs) -AGE LEVEL COMPULSORY FIELD

Narrow by SubjectAge: - childhood (birth-12 yrs) -AGE LEVEL COMPULSORY FIELD

Search modes - Boolean/Phrase

SU ("Cognitive Development" OR "Brain Development" OR "Emotional Development" OR "Psychosocial Development" OR Behavior OR Achievement OR Academic OR Literacy OR "Number

Comprehension" OR "Numerosity Perception" OR "Grade level" OR Outcomes OR Performance OR Persistence OR "Best Practices" OR "Evidence Based Practice")

AND

SU "school transition"

AND

"elementary education" OR "elementary school" OR "elementary schools" OR "primary education" OR "primary school" OR "primary schools" Or "middle school" OR "middle schools" OR "middle grades" OR "intermediate grades" OR "middle high" OR "high school" OR "high schools" OR "grade 4" OR "fourth grade" OR "grade 5" OR "fifth grade" OR "grade 6" OR "sixth grade" OR "grade 7" OR seventh grade" OR "grade 8 OR "eighth grade" OR "grade 9" OR "ninth grade"

NOT

SU (kindergarten* OR preschool*)

Appendix 2: Environmental scan search terms

Google search terms for environmental scan


Search term	N pages reviewed
Primary to secondary school transition program OR resource	5
Primary to high school transition program OR resource	5
Primary to secondary school	5
Primary to high school	5
Starting secondary school	5
Starting high school	5
Starting secondary school resource OR program	5
Starting high school resource OR program	5
Primary to secondary school transition professional learning	5
Primary to high school transition professional learning	5
Starting secondary school professional learning	5
Starting high school professional learning	5
Primary to secondary school transition guidelines	5
Primary to high school transition guidelines	5
Starting secondary school guidelines	5
Starting high school guidelines	5
Primary to secondary school transition strategy	5
Primary to high school transition strategy	5
Starting secondary school strategy	5
Starting high school strategy	5
Primary to secondary school transition evaluation	5
Primary to high school transition evaluation	5
Starting secondary school evaluation	5
Starting high school evaluation	5
Primary to secondary school transition support	5
Primary to high school transition support	5

Search term	N pages reviewed
Starting secondary school support	5
Starting high school support	5
Year 6 transition program	5
Year 7 transition program	5

In addition to the search terms above, Australian state and territory government education webpages were also checked for transition-related content. All relevant findings are reported in the environmental scan section. There were some instances where in-depth checks could not be made within these pages due to local teacher login requirements.

Appendix 3: Student forum support slides – Primary

Student Forums – Primary




Australian Council for Educational Research

1 ★

Student Forums project

- "Transitions"
- Student voice
- 20 schools around Australia
- At least one class per school
- Life Education Australia will then use the information to create helpful resources




Australian Council for Educational Research

2 ★

Data collection

- Survey task 1, traditional style
- Confidentiality



3


Activity 1

Booklet = your ideas and opinions

- Draw
- Write
- Speak

Activity 1


- Have you done any transition activities recently?



4

Activity 2

Choose one or more emoji that represents how you feel about your school transition.




Briefly label your emoji. What makes you feel that way?

5

Activity 2 (continued)

- What other things impact school transition?
- What else is going on in your world?


Draw/label these around the emoji of yourself.



6

Activity 2 (continued)


Examples:



7

Activity 2 (continued)

- Share your thoughts with the group
- What are the positives? What are the negatives?
- Add to your own ideas if you wish




8

Activity 3: ways forward

Pick one or two of the emoji you've used

- What worries or challenges you the most?
- What could help (more) with this?
- How could this be solved?
 - Do you need people, things, time, activities, money, etc. to solve it?




9

Activity 3 (continued)

If we worked out solutions to the challenges or ways to help students...

- How would you prefer to learn more?




10

Activity 4: anything else?

Survey – are others' ideas also true for you?

Is there anything else about transitions or related challenges you'd like to mention?



11

To finish...

Post your booklet
Take a flyer

Thank you 😊

Australian Council for Educational Research

12 ★

Appendix 4: Student forum support slides – Secondary

Student Forums – Secondary

Australian Council for Educational Research

1 ★

Student Forums project

- “Transitions”
- Student voice
- 20 schools around Australia
- At least one class per school
- Life Education Australia will then use the information to create helpful resources

Australian Council for Educational Research

2 ★

Data collection

- Survey task 1, traditional style
- Confidentiality

3

Activity 1

Booklet = your ideas and opinions

- Draw
- Write
- Speak

Activity 1

- Have you done any transition activities recently?

4

Activity 2

Choose one or more emoji that represents how you feel about your school transition.

Briefly label your emoji. What makes you feel that way?

5

Activity 2 (continued)

- What other things impact school transition?
- What else is going on in your world?

Draw/label these around the emoji of yourself.

6

Activity 2 (continued)

Example:

7

Activity 2 (continued)

- Share your thoughts with the group
- What are the positives? What are the negatives?
- Add to your own ideas if you wish

8

Activity 3: ways forward

Pick one or two of the emoji you've used

- What has worried or challenged you the most?
- What could have been done differently?
- What do you think would help new students at this school?
- What would be needed to do this?
 - Do you need people, things, time, activities, money, etc.?

9

Activity 3 (continued)

If we worked out solutions to the challenges or ways to help students...

- How would you prefer to learn more?

10

Activity 4: anything else?

Survey – are others' ideas also true for you?

Is there anything else about transitions or related challenges you'd like to mention?

11

To finish ...
Post your booklet
Take a flyer

Thank you 😊

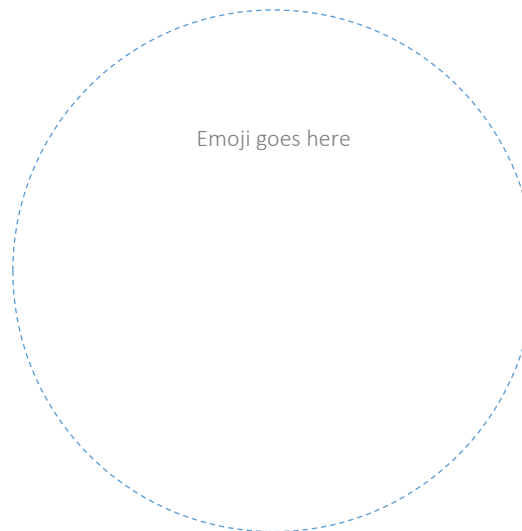
Australian Council for Educational Research

12 ★

Appendix 5: Forum workbook – Primary

Activity 2

How do you feel about the transition to middle or secondary school?



Activity 3

Pick one or two of your ideas

What worries or challenges you the most?

What could help with your challenge(s)? How could you or someone else solve this? What would be needed to solve it? (e.g., people, things, time, activities, money)



How (or from whom) would you prefer to learn more?

Help us keep your ideas confidential...

Do not write your name in this booklet

Feel free to use the space below for any spare-time play or extra ideas

Activity 1

Thinking about transition

Have you done any activities to prepare for your own school change (either to a different school, or to a new sub-school)? What were they?

Activity 4

Which of these school-transition topics would you like to know more about?

	Yes	No	Don't know
1. How my new school operates (timetables, maps)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Academics (how difficult is the work?)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. People – teachers, friends (who will be there?)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. Workload (how much school work or homework will I have?)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. Time for fun (sports/activities vs school work)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Is there anything else about transitions or related challenges you'd like to mention?

Thank you very much for your ideas and comments

To help us mix and match information from the booklets, please tick what applies to you.

Are you: ☐ Male ☐ Female ☐ Non-binary ☐ Prefer not to say

Are you: ☐ Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander ☐ Neither Aboriginal nor Torres Strait Islander ☐ Prefer not to say

Have you had a disability for more than 6 months (e.g., hearing or visual difficulties, in a wheelchair, mental illness)? ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Prefer not to say

How often do you speak English at home? ☐ Always ☐ Most of the time ☐ Sometimes ☐ Never ☐ Prefer not to say

SF...Primary

Improving Learning

ACER – LEA Student Forums
Terms 1–2, 2021

Student transitions
Student voice

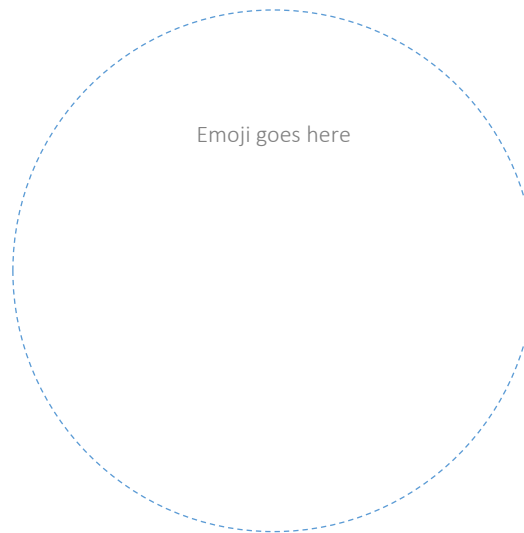
Australian Council for Educational Research

ACER

Appendix 6: Forum workbook – Secondary

Activity 2

How do you feel about the transition to middle or secondary school?



Activity 3

Pick one or two of your ideas

What has worried or challenged you the most? What could have been done differently?

What do you think would help new students transition into this school? What could you or someone else do to help? What would be needed to solve it? (e.g., people, things, time, activities, money)



How (or from whom) would you prefer to learn more?

Help us keep your ideas confidential...

Do not write your name in this booklet

Feel free to use the space below for any spare-time play or extra ideas

Activity 1

Thinking about transition

Have you done any activities to prepare for your own school change (either to a different school, or to a new sub-school)? What were they?

Activity 4

Which of these school-transition topics would you like to know more about?

	Yes	No	Don't know
6. How my new school operates (timetables, maps)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. Academics (how difficult is the work?)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. People – teachers, friends (who will be there?)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. Workload (how much school work or homework will I have?)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10. Time for fun (sports/activities vs school work)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Is there anything else about transitions or related challenges you'd like to mention?

Thank you very much for your ideas and comments

To help us mix and match information from the booklets, please tick what applies to you.

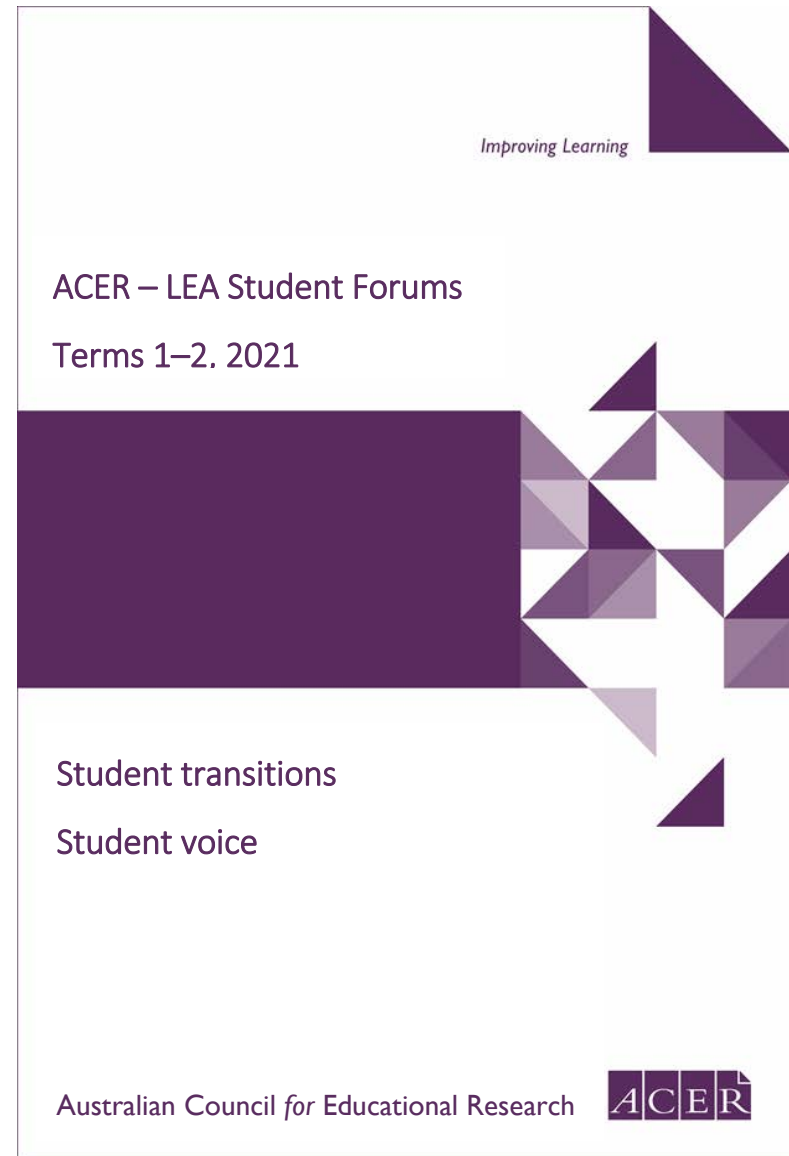
Are you: ☐ Male ☐ Female ☐ Non-binary ☐ Prefer not to say

Are you: ☐ Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander ☐ Neither Aboriginal nor Torres Strait Islander ☐ Prefer not to say

Have you had a disability for more than 6 months (e.g., hearing or visual difficulties, in a wheelchair, mental illness)? ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Prefer not to say

How often do you speak English at home? ☐ Always ☐ Most of the time ☐ Sometimes ☐ Never ☐ Prefer not to say

SF...Secondary



Appendix 7: Analysis by school & student demographics, overview table

		School and participating class descriptors				Student demographics (self-identified) †		
		School type (primary, secondary, combined)	Location (metro, inner or outer regional, remote)	School ICSEA value (low, medium, high)	Pre- or post- transition students ‡	Student gender (male, female) *	Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander status (yes, no) *	Disability status (yes, no) *
Activity 1: Transition activities	During/post transition activities	+ (s)	+ (or)		+ (po)			+ (y)
	Pre-transition research & application	+ (p)	+ (r)	+ (h)	+ (pr)			
	Practising organisational/academic skills		+ (or)	+ (l)				
	Activating networks & networking skills		+ (m)					
Activity 2a: Students’ feelings about transition	Joy		+ (ir)	+ (m,h)			- (y)	
	Fear		+ (m,r)	+ (m,h)		+ (f)		- (y)
	Uncertainty	- (c)					+ (y)	+ (y)
	Contentment						- (y)	
	Sadness		+ (ir)			+ (f)		
	All other feelings**							
Activity 2b: Explanation of feelings	Academics			+ (h)		+ (f)		
	High school systems	+ (s)			+ (po)	+ (f)		
	Social challenges	- (c)	- (r)			+ (f)		
	Fresh start	- (c)	- (r)	+ (h)		+ (f)		
	Confident/informed		+ (ir,or)					
	Uncertainty	+ (p)	+ (m)		+ (pr)			
	All other explanations of feelings**							
Activity 3a: Identifying the main challenges	Academics	+ (c)	- (m)		+ (pr)			- (y)
	Managing new school environment		+ (m)	+ (l)				
	Social	- (c)	+ (m)					
	Self-management			+ (h)				
	Personal/student-specific challenge							+ (y)
	All other main challenges**							
Activity 3b: Potential solutions	Managing school work	+ (c)	+ (r)		+ (pr)			- (y)
	Managing school environment	+ (s)	+ (m)	+ (l)				
	Social	+ (p)	+ (m)		+ (pr)			
	Self-management			+ (h)				
	All other solutions**							
Activity 4: What do students want to know?	Time for fun							
	Workload							
	Academics							
	People							
	How my new school operates	- (c)			+ (pr)			
Learning preferences	Use of technology/videos/computers							+ (y)
	All other learning preferences**							

Notes:

‘+’ and ‘-’ are difference indicators. ‘+’ indicates students were more likely to respond in this category; - indicates less likely.

†There were no significant differences when data was analysed by *Language background other than English*. This demographic has been left out of the table.

‡“Pre-transition” includes students in primary schools and those in the primary section of combined schools. “Post-transition” includes students in secondary schools and those in the secondary section of combined schools.

*Students who identified as non-binary or ticked “prefer not to say” in their demographic indicators are not included in this table as numbers in these categories are too small for robust statistical testing.

**Activity responses with no school descriptor or student demographic differences are grouped as ‘all other...’

Classifiers in brackets refer to the response options, e.g. (s) under *school type* refers to secondary.

Blank boxes indicate there was no significant differences within the activity responses.

